The Green Wedge Essays

Climate views in context

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The Green Wedge Essays:

The wonderfully idiosyncratic views of Europeans on climate and the environment

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In our work on climate policy in Europe, we have chosen to take a double approach. First, we wanted to get a sense of what one might think of as the 'unguarded conversation' that takes place on social media. While the conversation may well be polarising, distorting, full of grandstanding – it is nevertheless largely 'uncurated' and therefore quite authentic (though not necessarily representative), in a warts-and-all kind of way. It may be self-conscious and often self-referential, but it is also free-flowing and reflective of how, at least parts of, different audiences are thinking and talking about the issue of climate, and climate policy.

But the social media conversations are also idiosyncratic: they are reflective of particular contexts, a political culture, a media and political landscape, a historical set of references. It is to make sure that these specificities are granted their proper weight that we commissioned these eight essays. To make sure that the deeper, culturally and politically embedded views from which these powerful social media snippets emerge are taken into account. These essays therefore can easily stand alone in their quality and insights, but they go hand in hand with our recent *Green Wedge* report and – perhaps above all – with our forthcoming country analyses of the social media discussion around the European Green Deal (EGD) and more broadly climate policy.

A one-size climate policy message most definitely does not fit all of Europe – because Europeans relate to their surroundings, to their environment, to their planet in wild, wonderful and sometimes bizarre ways.

Not only is it fascinating to delve into the myriad roles and meanings attributed to nature and to the environment across the European continent, it is also crucial from a political perspective, and if the EU is to act as one, to make sure that messaging and framing are hypersensitive to context. A one-size climate policy message most definitely does not fit all of Europe – because Europeans relate to their surroundings, to their environment, to their planet in wild, wonderful and sometimes bizarre ways. More or less socially, more or less romantically, more or less architecturally, more or less politically explicitly. Anyone trying to convince them, anyone trying to understand them needs to start with that in mind.

Dealing with potential backlashes against climate policy is set to become a full-time job; so identifying where these might come from or how they might evolve will be crucial. Understanding how one can appeal to Europeans to change their habits all the while protecting their lifestyles and well-being, their favourite landscapes or public squares, but also their political and social institutions, this is the crucial work that needs to be tackled.

The essays give us some clues as to what climate policy-makers need to know in order to act effectively and with agility in very different contexts. We know for instance that…

The backlash is already well under way in those places where climate policy and pro-climate attitudes have pervaded the ideological and party-political landscape. Our essays on Denmark (by Anders Blok and Anna Helene Kvist Møller) and Sweden (Torsten Kjellgren) are both vivid illustrations of the fact that climate can easily become the next wedge issue after immigration – deftly manipulated by populist parties. In those countries where the climate issue has been most successfully adopted by mainstream parties and where Green parties have been most successful, there has been a soft but effective backlash by populist parties. Populist parties have not gone full 'climate-sceptic', but in both countries traditional agrarian populism is adopting an 'anti-climate hysteria' stance. So, climate has become a political stake, but it has not created consensus. We need to be ready for this to happen elsewhere as EGD measures start to pervade daily life and habits.

Germany, a country where Green politics has been long established, powerful, and politically relevant, has encountered some of these same issues. However, as highlighted in Jon Worth's piece, the decentralised nature of Germany means that climate policy is placed under the strain of two main drivers: regionalism and incrementalism. Regionalism militates against centralised, national-level, one-size-fits-all policies in a country where both industry and agriculture have strong regional bases. Incrementalism reflects an aversion to any suggestion of political break or revolutionary upheaval. German policy-makers (often characterised by careers that typically straddle government and industry) are well aware of this. Imposing norms that are perceived as national (let alone international) in contexts that are irredeemably defined by regional interests has given rise to what Germans refer to as 'raging citizens' (*Wutbürgers*). These are not just the traditionally 'left behind' that voted for Brexit or supported the French Gilets jaunes, they are much more middle-class voters who are reluctant to adopt norms and rules that flout a deeply regionalised political and social imaginary.

Italy offers another version of the power of regionalism in Europe. Highly decentralised, offering a collection of powerful towns (rather than only an urban/rural divide) that entrench strong regional identities, Italy's relationship to environmental policies is culturally and emotionally mediated by the density of its urban and

human environment. In a heavily urbanised place, familiar with earthquake destruction of the built environment (and the deep social and human consequences of such episodes), framing climate policy aspirations around a social and cultural way of life (perhaps more than around a natural environment that is so enmeshed with social behaviour from time immemorial) is perhaps a more effective appeal. A more local (perhaps regional or municipal) approach may well bypass national level politics and find greater traction. As Giuseppe Grieco points out in his essay, during the pandemic citizens could perceive the seriousness of the situation by looking out from their balconies at the desolate *piazze* of their cities. The virus attacked the most profound identity of each city by altering its symbols. Surrounded by a maritime space and exposed to intensifying extreme events, Italy risks losing its constellation of cities and its identity *tout court*. The fight to protect Italian cities from climate change offers the opportunity to place climate policy at the centre of the nation's political imagination and present the climate change fight not as a futuristic project but as the revival of an idea familiar to Italian culture and identity: *the utopia of the ideal city*. This is a lesson that we should draw across the board.

Despite a significant measure of political and administrative decentralisation since the 1980s, not only is policy still driven by Paris, but the sense of centre versus periphery threatens to overwhelm French politics and policy. Not only will climate policy be perceived as an elite, Parisian enterprise, but it will also be labelled an urban enterprise in a country still deeply committed to its agriculture sector (even if that sector represents only 2.8% of jobs). The mix of terroir alienation + the sentiment of abandonment by the provinces is an explosive mix. Both of which are susceptible to right-wing populist appeals. One interesting potential silver lining is the – measured – fact that climate acts as an umbrella for a set of concerns that dovetail with some key aspirations and French values, bringing together a variety of issues and discourses that resonate across the party-political landscape when it comes to lifestyle, culture, responsibility and the kind of lifestyle that most French people aspire to. As François-Xavier Demoures concludes with typical optimism, in that respect, there is still a hope that a coherent but diverse narrative can emerge around a vision of a balanced and sustainable social model.

In places where Green politics and climate policy are lagging behind (for example Poland, Spain and the Czech Republic), a number of things are at play. As the essay by Edwin Bendyk makes clear, Poland is a perfect illustration of how a climate frontrunner (that adopted progressive climate policies as early as the 1990s) can stall if the transition is perceived as socially unjust and coming at the expense of

jobs and economic security. In Spain, too (despite climate awareness across Spanish society), the transition to democratic politics (in 1975) had an impact on environmental policy: in the years when the first green parties were emerging in New Zealand, Holland and Germany, Spain was immersed in a transition that would yield an institutional architecture and a party system that was to remain unaltered for more than three decades – and that would block environmental politics. And, as Cristina Monge highlights, contrary to Poland, a strong environmental stance was not part of the rebellion against the old regime. As such, environmental policy in Spain is debated along the traditional political lines of a country still in the midst of an unfinished economic and political transition: right-wing parties defending a growth-led transition, and left-wing parties defending jobs – with those two cleavages reinforced by a rural/urban divide that still runs deep. For Spain, the challenge will be to come up with a narrative that breaks with an entrenched political status quo – and thus an entrenched political vision that sees Spain as entering modernity rather than entering a new phase of politics driven by new imperatives and values. Strengthening its civil society actors across different regions (including Catalunya) could be the fastest way to accomplish the transformation.

Finally, the essay by Sasha Kovalevska is a precious glimpse into the kinds of hard contradictions that Europe itself can inject into attitudes towards climate policy: beyond the chequered and fragmented nature of the Czech Republic as land and population, the main issue acting against support for climate policy is the very relationship to the EU itself – which acts as a brake in a country whose collective imagination is replete with references and aspirations to nature and to a life lived in the open.

One key thing to emerge from these essays and our research is that a solid majority of the public in every country hungers for a different type of good life – whether it is in a loved Italian city, or in rural Denmark, whether it's about balance or security, health or work. Whether they connect it explicitly to climate or not. The job of politicians should be to help make that connection between climate and everyday life; outline how the constraints imposed by climate pressures can allow us to protect and experience the places and rituals we care about; and create a framework that can help citizens imagine what new rituals and ways of life can replace those that have diminishing returns for ourselves and our planet.

The job of politicians should be to help make that connection between climate and everyday life.

Second, divisions between centre and periphery (both geographically and metaphorically – those who feel undervalued feel no less peripheral to our economic and cultural ecosystems) underpin the resentments that have already been voiced. These cleavages will be relentlessly exploited by populists and climate policy detractors; new narratives need to emerge that create a vision that can leapfrog them through bold strokes of our collective imagination by reaching deep into what we value most about our personal, social and national lives, past and present.

Finally, these essays and their authors exhort us to think of climate policy as everyday life. We are facing a set of deep, radical transformations. The only way to encourage support and consent for policies that are set – and designed – to transform every aspect of our lives is to enable citizens to imagine daily life as a set of new opportunities. This, as each essay makes clear, is about how we imagine and live in a present that we need to create, rather than some distant vision of the future.

Paris, March 2021 (one year into the Covid pandemic)

Denmark:

From rural populism to new compromises for green transition?

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Introduction: anti-environmental backlash in the frontrunner country

Over the past three or four decades, Denmark has come to reshape its national identity around the notion of being an environmental frontrunner country (*foregangsland*, in Danish), and has gained international recognition along such lines. So-called ecological modernisation policies in the realms of cleaner production, environmental standard-setting, green taxation, low-carbon energy innovation (i.e. wind turbines) and consumption of organic produce have all progressed further in Denmark than in most other European (and global) settings. Nowadays, notions of green growth and green transition form part of the official social contract, as upheld by all branches of the corporatist power elite and enshrined in a new 2020 national climate law. This law stipulates a 70% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions relative to 1990 levels by 2030 as an overarching societal goal. It came into effect following a period of renewed green civil society activism from 2018 and what was widely seen as the national 'climate election' in 2019.

Despite all this, the experience of an anti-environmental backlash is not at all foreign to Denmark. Around the turn of the millennium, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Danish environmental policy-making experienced a serious upheaval and reversal, the most visible face of which was 'sceptical environmentalist' Bjørn Lomborg. A political scientist by training, Lomborg attained fame in the Danish public sphere in the late 1990s by promoting the claim that, contrary to what he dubbed 'the environmentalist litany', the state of the environment was actually getting better, not worse. Practically, Lomborg advised, this meant spending less and getting 'more environment for the money'. Aided by this slogan, the 2001 right-of-centre coalition government set out to correct what it saw as the costly and over-ambitious environmental policies of the previous Social Democratic-led left-of-centre government. In the process, it dismantled many research and development initiatives, regulatory agencies and policies, and public environmental outreach programmes. The idea was floated that Denmark needed a break from the 'environmental empire' built up by the previous government and embodied by its ambitious minister of the environment, Svend Auken. The Danish people would again be liberated from the tyranny of environmental experts.

In his account of these events, sociologist Andrew Jamison (2004) makes an astute observation, still highly relevant for understanding the fate of environmental and climate policy-making in Denmark: Danish environmental policy, argues Jamison, arises at the intersection of what remains the country's two distinct and

historically rooted political cultures, that of rural populism and urban cosmopolitanism, respectively. More than clear-cut spatial divides, these two oppositional ideological formations drive collective political identifications in Denmark in socio-economically and socio-geographically patterned ways, in particular when it comes to environmental questions. The archetypical site of ideological confrontation remains Denmark's large-scale animal–industrial agriculture sector. This sector is tied in complicated ways to national origin myths of Denmark as a quintessentially agrarian society as well as to present-day export incomes (even with dwindling employment). Extrapolating from Jamison, current-day green transition policies in Denmark look poised to make or break chiefly around the question of the future fate of agriculture – and the mixed bag of ideological identifications that come with Danish-style rural populism.

Danish environmental policy, argues Jamison, arises at the intersection of what remains the country's two distinct and historically rooted political cultures, that of rural populism and urban cosmopolitanism, respectively.

Rural populism's double-edged relation to environmentalism

Rural populism runs deep in Danish modern history, in ways not unlike political traditions found across the Nordic countries, yet arguably with distinct ramifications. Indeed, in Denmark, it has served to shape some of the most esteemed aspects of national democracy, including its commitment to broad-based and consensus-seeking deliberation as a locus of political legitimacy (Horst & Irwin, 2010). As a nexus of influential ideas, it may be traced back not least to 19th-century poet, priest and politician N.F.S. Grundtvig, who advocated a programme of national education and enlightenment of a distinctly 'popular' (*folkelig*) bent. In the new 'folk high schools' that he helped found, and which are still in existence today, the Grundtvigians put emphasis on knowledge of practical life, siding with unassuming common people in the countryside over urban elites. An often-quoted line from a well-known Grundtvig song reads: 'And the sun rises with the farmer, not at all with the learned' (Grundtvig, 1839). This kind of anti-elitist sentiment has shaped environmental attitudes in Denmark up until today, although in ambiguous ways.

On the one hand, the environmental movement that arose around 1970 and attained a more significant public presence in Denmark than in most other countries in many ways marked a temporary coming together of rural populist with urban cosmopolitan worldviews, practices and ideologies. Indeed, along with the

student movement and the youth rebellion of the late 1960s, new environmental activists drew directly on the Danish tradition of participatory democracy associated with the Grundtvigian folk high schools in their efforts to create public awareness of and engagement with environmental problems. The 'grassroots' dimension remained important to the activists, staged at the level of communal lifestyles through local experiments in alternative living. This was true, not least, for the cross-fertilisation of cultural influences that shaped early experiments with wind energy among alternative farm communes in the Danish countryside, as well as for the organic agriculture that was practiced early and widely in Denmark, compared to other countries. These early movement efforts in eco-technologies have since consolidated to become large-scale markets backing up the eco-modernist Danish state's green growth visions.

On the other hand, however, as environmental activism became professionalised in the 1990s – and morphed into green NGOs that have moved closer to the corporatist, state-governing elite – rural populism came to be echoed instead through recurrent critiques of environmental experts, bureaucrats and over-zealous green politicians. Even as he embraced Lomborg as an 'alternative' expert, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, then prime minister of the liberal, right-of-centre Venstre party, infamously cast environmental experts as out of touch with the practical constraints on life as led by common people in a 2002 New Year speech. Here, Rasmussen (2002) invoked a 'tyranny of experts' which threatened 'to oppress the free popular (*folkelig*) debate'. As historically the party of rural smallholders and industrial farmers, the Venstre-led government steered Denmark into a de facto climate-sceptical and largely anti-environmental policy route from 2001 to 2006. From here on, the party changed course, disavowing Lomborg and officially (re-)aligning with a green growth-based ideological compromise by then (re-)forming across the rest of the Danish power elite. This compromise lasted until 2019, ebbing and flowing only a little in degrees of green commitment, even as power shifted back and forth between left- and right-of-centre governments.

Unlike other European countries with sizeable agriculture sectors, Denmark did not experience widespread farmers' protests in 2019, amid otherwise rising public awareness of long-standing evidence as to the sector's nitrogen and, more recently, carbon pollution footprints (van der Ploeg, 2020). The account above provides some of the necessary backdrop to understanding this initially surprising observation. Led by Venstre, the Danish state had simply proven quite 'understanding' and 'accommodating' towards farmers' interests in ensuing years, providing little ground for the articulation of grievances. Specifically, since 2015, the right-

of-centre government had taken steps to soften the country's nitrogen runoff regulations, despite heated discussions between policy-makers and researchers as to the measures and their consequences. Also, as of 2019, few binding forms of greenhouse gas regulation in agricultural production were in place, even as various voluntary measures were being debated among stakeholders. This situation is set to change rather dramatically going ahead, as the agricultural sector's contribution to the 2020 climate law target of 70% reduction in 2030 is scheduled for (or rather, postponed to) spring of 2021.

Right-wing climate scepticism weak, then dormant

In short, rural populism provides a cultural–ideological repertoire from which a sizeable minority of Danes will draw their green transition reluctance.

In short, rural populism provides a cultural–ideological repertoire from which a sizeable minority of Danes will draw their green transition reluctance if not downright scepticism over the coming years. From recent thematic surveys (Concito, 2020), we might estimate the core carrier group of this formation to currently constitute roughly 15–20% of the population. They form the polar counterpoint to the also roughly 20–25% of dark-green citizens, hailing from among higher education students and the urban professional classes, for whom concern with ecology and climate constitute a dominant theme of their personal and political identities. Between these two minority groups – rural populists and urban cosmopolitans – the majority of the Danish citizenry develop their environmental attitudes in more malleable and less principled ways. They do so, in these times, through pragmatic negotiations between their marked climatic concerns and their equally strong commitments to welfare state-infused status quo principles of lifestyles and solidarities potentially seen as threatened by a too-strong green transition. Some may be swayed to either extreme, but many are likely to stay within this centrist ideological territory. This 20–60–20 model, then, constitutes the *two* frontiers, the negotiation terms, and the likely clashes ahead in Danish popular climatic politics.

In contrast to rural populism, active climate scepticism in its politicised forms has never attained much of a foothold in Denmark. Since its founding in 1995, the far-right Danish People's Party has attained a significant role in Danish parliamentary politics, and it has acted as the likely political home to rural populists on a number of issues. Yet, contrary to some international tendencies (Vihma et al., 2020), the party has largely ignored rather than politicised environmental and

climate issues, being visible only in campaigns against large inland windmills (but not against wind power in its offshore version). Occasionally, over the years, party members have gone on public record stating their doubt in climate science and airing the possibility that current warming tendencies express natural variations rather than anthropogenic sources. Still, climate scepticism has never become an official or constituent part of the party's programme.

This situation looked poised to change in the run-up to the 2019 parliamentary elections. Under pressure from a resurgent green civil society, climate issues attained a very prominent role in election debates, to the point, as noted, of later earning it the label as the first 'climate election' in the country's history. Leaders of the Danish People's Party initially reacted by criticising the climate activists and fellow parliamentarians for engaging in an unsound race of 'green, greener, greenest' (Vihma et al., 2020: 36). A few days before election night, a high-ranking member of parliament commented that '[t]here is some climate hysteria in this election campaign'. Referring to the Danish agricultural sector, he added that 'we forget where we come from as a country', since he would not want to see a country in which people shamed others for eating beef and drinking milk. Similarly, on election night, the iconic founder, Ms Pia Kjærsgaard, commented on the party's poor election results, saying that 'maybe it is because of all those – what should we call them – climate fools [*klimatosser*]'. Despite these signs of anti-climate scepticism, in the weeks and months to follow, the Danish People's Party adopted a more light-green pragmatic stance, arguing that a 70% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2030 would be too costly, yet a 60% reduction would be feasible and appropriate. If anything, then, right-wing climate scepticism overall went from weak to dormant – even as the election debates *also* showcased signs of radical transition scepticism that may well re-emerge. In any case, the question of anti-green rural populism's political home in future years is (still) up for grabs.

Meanwhile, the term and symbol 'climate fool' [*klimatosse*] attained a life of its own in Danish climate debates and popular culture, in many ways contrary to that intended by Ms Kjærsgaard. Hence, it was immediately reappropriated by the very group criticised, the young urban green cosmopolitans for whom climate transition is happening too slowly. The term went viral on social media and was later named 'new word of the year' by the Danish Language Council. As such, it showcases those very socio-symbolic divides within which Danish green transition debates are currently constituted, with the dormant rural-populist critique embedded into the very fabric of urban-cosmopolitan green

identities and language. Like other such situations, the *klimatosse* symbol thus points to likely antagonistic clashes ahead.

The dark-green frontline in personal and socio-political life

As part of a wider research project (Albris et al., 2020), we delved into the use of *klimatosse* on the popular image-sharing platform Instagram, very much a home platform also for those dark-green urban cosmopolitans who sympathise with or themselves participate in youth-driven climate activism. Here, being a *klimatosse*, a climate fool, is clearly something to be proud of. The hashtag #klimatosse has been added to more than 8,000 images and several profiles, including blogs and shops that use the word to brand themselves as green. Images tend to fall within one of three categories. First, consumer products such as metal straws, cloth diapers, home-sewn face masks, tote bags and other (more or less) 'sustainable' substitutes dominate the visual #klimatosse landscape. This represents a culture for whom green transition can and should (in part) happen by way of changes in individual consumer practices. Second, self-proclaimed *klimatosser* present themselves via images of vegetarian meals, vegan desserts, organic and green foods, vegetable crops and other types of 'sustainable' foods, again advocating for green transition by way of micro-changes in the private sphere of foodstuffs. Third, houseplants, flowers, trees and nature-in-general are visible parts of #klimatosse on Instagram. To the young urban greeners, nature is something that should be enjoyed and incorporated into daily life, a somewhat romantic add-on, and a place to occasionally *visit*. One can imagine how this cosmopolitan perception of nature contrasts with that of rural (agri-)culture.

While clearly not providing the full view of urban-cosmopolitan attitudes to climate transition and policy in contemporary Denmark, this Instagram-based depiction is nevertheless telling. At work is very much a culture of active, everyday and consumption-based participation in green transition, a project depicted as both personally meaningful and socially desirable. Telling as well is the almost complete absence of any acknowledgement of difficulty, struggle or ambiguity in how these people perform and stage their personal environmental commitments and responsibilities. Although of course in part reflecting norms of the medium, it is hard not to see in these public invocations of greenness a bounded collective performance of social and moral privilege, implicitly marking out also a space of dis-taste and un-responsibility. As such, the *klimatosse* sphere on Instagram

becomes almost a caricature version of what rural populists are likely to loathe about green transition: the way it may feed into moralised senses of class privilege, with little concern for how access to this project is structured by socio-economic inequalities.

In the wider public–political realm of Danish climate policy and green transition, a newly prominent cleavage has opened up since the 2019 election, formed around this question of social inequality and justice.

Indeed, in the wider public–political realm of Danish climate policy and green transition, a newly prominent cleavage has opened up since the 2019 election, formed around this question of social inequality and justice. Hence, it is not simply that the power elite as a whole has come to accept and domesticate a version of the 70% reduction target as fully consistent with ingrained business-and competition-friendly notions of green growth and green-technology innovation, and that green activists are contesting this eco-modernist ideology in the name of more ambitious, more globally just, and more encompassing sustainability visions. As noted, this situation is very much business-as-usual in Danish environmental and climate politics, with the dark-green, activist frontline continuously re-adjusting its critiques to the current parliamentary status quo. What is more noticeable, however, is that in the same process, the green transition agenda is being seriously expanded and potentially recast, as more stakeholders join in (e.g. unions) and as the agenda infiltrates into core policy domains (e.g. welfare). Concomitantly, more policy actors are now asking: who should bear the burdens, and who should reap the benefits, of green transition?

On these newly prominent questions, neither the rural populists nor the urban cosmopolitans provide much guidance, even as these cultural repertoires of course still express themselves through their political organs, the agricultural lobby and the green NGOs, respectively. At stake, rather, is the extent to which the key stakeholders of the Danish welfare and later competition state – the employer organisations and the unions, in their various national guises, and in their links to party politics – are able to work out new compromises among their often-times conflicting interests in economic competitiveness, social equality and security, and environmental and climate protection. In other words, as climate policy ambitions go up during these years, the very fabric of the existing social welfare contract is potentially put at stake, as all elite policy actors re-arrange their mutual stakes and compromises in societal development. Given widespread commitments to egalitarianism among the Danish citizenry, the key question is likely to be: will new green transition compromises be widely perceived as socially fair and just?

Conclusion: the post-Coronavirus landscape of transition frontlines

On this point, the jury is still out. The current Social Democratic-led government has so far opted for a cautious approach, preferring to dampen their green transition ambitions to preserve popular support for their social equality position, no doubt sensing the dilemmas ahead. They are under parliamentary pressure, however, from a green bloc of impatient support parties, on the one hand – pushing for measures like ambitious production- and consumption-based carbon taxation – and a right-of-centre opposition with historical and cultural ties to the agricultural sector, along with ideological commitments to Danish market competitiveness in general, on the other hand. At present, the Covid-19 situation plays into this parliamentary stalemate in unpredictable ways, and the mink-culling scandal unfolding these days may or may not represent a preview of rural populism-based protests to come. What is clear, however, is that a three-fold landscape of frontlines will re-emerge post-Coronavirus: can new societal compromises be found among the rural populists, the urban-green cosmopolitans and the welfare-committed majority?

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The Swedish Climate Paradox:

Polarisation in the land of consensus

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Sweden is often perceived as a 'climate frontrunner', by other countries and by Swedes themselves. Home to the world-famous climate activist Greta Thunberg, as well as prominent climate research, the country can look back on several decades of advocating for environmental and climate action.

The Swedish Social Democratic Prime Minister Olof Palme hosted the UN Conference on the Human Environment (also referred to as the Stockholm Conference) in 1972. The conference was a success: it resulted in the signing of the Stockholm Declaration consisting of 26 principles for environmental protection; and perhaps, even more importantly, served to establish the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

At the conference, Palme gave a passionate speech where he argued that industrial expansion, mass consumerism and economic growth had caused big environmental problems. Pushing for stronger international cooperation to tackle these problems he concluded:

> The air we breathe is not the property of any one nation – we share it. The big oceans are not divided by national frontiers – they are our common property. What is asked of us is not to relinquish our national sovereignty but to use it to further the common good. It is to abide by certain agreed international rules in order to safeguard our common property, to leave something for us and future generations to share. (Palme, 1972)

Palme's stance was by no means a conventional one among Western European countries at the time. Rather, it stood out as it addressed problems of great magnitude that many could not, or did not want to, admit to.

The Stockholm Conference and its outcomes laid the foundations for Sweden to become a big player in the environmental and climate arena. In subsequent decades, international recognition and national pride helped in shaping the self-image of Swedes as frontrunners tackling climate change.

Visiting Stockholm, Gothenburg or Malmö today, one will notice wide bike lanes full of cyclists, and electric buses and trains full of people who prefer using public transportation everyday rather than taking the car. The combination of a climate-aware population, combined with a government that has high climate ambitions, means that 'climate pride' is part of many Swedes' identity.

The Green Party has been in government for the first time (since 2014), as the coalition partner to the Social Democrats (Sweden's dominant party since the early 20th century). The Green Party has managed to make an impact on government climate policies – not least because it holds the Ministry for Climate and the Environment. With the joint political goal of becoming 'the first fossil-free welfare state in the world', the red-green coalition has stepped up the ambition both in rhetoric and in practice, compared to the previous centre-right government (2006–2014). Politics have become even greener with the Greens.

However, the Green Party is struggling in the polls. If an election were held today, the party would barely reach the necessary threshold of 4% to remain in parliament. In fact, the Green Party has never gained considerable success in a national election. Their best result was in 2010: 7.34% (Statistics Sweden, 2020). The current 4% is far from the recent electoral successes of its sister parties in Germany or Austria.

Further, climate is a highly polarising issue in Sweden as the debate tends to, perhaps more than in other countries, place much focus on individual lifestyles. The polarised debate has caused a cleavage that is unusual in a country historically shaped by political consensus.

Climate is a highly polarising issue in Sweden as the debate tends to, perhaps more than in other countries, place much focus on individual lifestyles.

How can we understand all this?

The place of geography and demographics

Sweden is a big country, but with a small population mainly concentrated in relatively limited parts in the south. The ideal of a climate-friendly lifestyle might be strong in the southern urban areas, symbolised by widespread vegetarianism and crowded bike lanes. However, the lifestyle of most people in the scarcely populated northern parts, which makes up the largest part of Sweden, is different. There, the distances are so large that people rely heavily on cars and flying. Biking is simply not an option for people who have more than 50 km between their home and their workplace (and the cold winters do not help either). The transportation infrastructure is not as widely available as in the south, lacking subways and trams, and with buses running only a few times per day. Thus, taking the car every day is the only realistic option for many people. Similarly, visiting the capital for a meeting can mean

travelling around 1,000 km. Taking the train, the climate-friendly option, entails 12 hours of travelling, often more. Flying takes about one hour and is therefore the only option for many people travelling to Stockholm or even further south. This does not compare well with the frequent train regime between the more southern cities of Stockholm and Gothenburg, where the trip takes less than three hours.

Still, personal carbon footprint in Sweden is closely connected to socio-economic status. The wealthiest 10% of the population, mostly living in or around the big cities in the south, cause far more pollution than the working-class and lower middle-class in the rural north (Oxfam, 2020). Although there is a widespread ideal of a climate-friendly lifestyle in the urban south, the fact that it is home to the wealthiest groups of the population means that both personal consumption and carbon footprint is higher there than in the rural north.

However, both in media and in social contexts the socio-economic factor has often been neglected. Instead, more attention has been given to personal lifestyle choices, such as vegetarianism or taking the train instead of flying. In recent years, the concept of 'flight shame' (in Swedish, *flygskam*) has emerged and is now well established. It refers to the act of expecting everyone not to fly, and imposes guilt on those who still choose to do it. Many people living in the north, who cannot see any alternative, feel personally attacked. Their geographic location and lack of infrastructure makes it impossible for them to do things that seem fairly easy for people living in the southern urban areas: such as taking the train instead of flying domestically. Paradoxically, people in the north tend to consume fewer goods, fly abroad less frequently both for business and leisure, and thus have a smaller personal carbon footprint than the wealthiest groups who live in the urban south. Evidently, ideals and actual outcomes do not correspond with each other in this case.

Many people in the north have felt neglected by the government for a long time due to a lack of investment in infrastructure. They have also witnessed a big depopulation with a strong urbanisation to the south. This has caused a scepticism towards the southern urban areas, above all Stockholm. The climate debate focusing on personal lifestyle choices has fuelled this further. Many people in the north feel guilt imposed on them for their lifestyle, to which they cannot see any realistic alternative to (yet they cause less pollution than those in the urban south). This has caused climate dissent among certain groups and an increased geographic polarisation. The Green Party did not secure a single seat in the national parliament north of Uppsala, a city 100 km north of Stockholm, in the last national election. This clearly shows the polarisation between the urban south and the rural north.

An even stronger climate dissent has emerged on the issue of taking the car. A widespread anger, primarily in the countryside, over the continuing increase in the price of gas as a main climate measure, led to the formation of 'Gas Rebellion 2.0' (in Swedish, *Bensinuppроret 2.0*). The group can in some regard be perceived as the Swedish equivalent to Les Gilets jaunes in France. Although the Swedish group has been less influential than the French one, it has successfully gathered 572,000 members on Facebook in a country of ten million people. The group demands, among other things, that tax on gas be cut by 30% (Gas Rebellion 2.0, 2020).

Gas Rebellion 2.0 has managed to canalise the widespread anger towards policies from the government in Stockholm. There is a widespread notion in the Swedish countryside that they are the ones who have to pay the price for the climate transition by paying higher prices for gas, whereas the people in big cities get the subsidies. This was exemplified further by the public anger in the countryside (primarily in the north) over the government's previous subsidies for purchasing electric bikes, which have now been revoked. Electric bikes are not a serious option as a means of transportation in northern Sweden considering the greater distances and colder winters. Thus, the critics argued that the subsidy was largely unfair and only benefiting people in the urban south.

Hence, in a climate debate that focuses on individual lifestyles more than on socio-economic factors (which are the real determinants of pollution), climate taxes and subsidies by the government together with social phenomena such as 'flight shame' are perceived by many people in the countryside as a personal attack. This has intensified the debate's geographic polarisation and created even stronger climate dissent among certain groups. Consequently, the Green Party has failed to appeal to voters outside the southern urban areas and is widely disliked in the rural north (Bernhardsson & Kjellgren, 2018).

Collectivism in a culture of individualism: the challenge of the Greens

Sweden has a strong individualistic culture in some ways: personal space is important, just as is work–life balance that allows for personal hobbies and interests outside work. Swedes move out from their parents' home at a younger age than most other Europeans. The freedom to choose one's own path in education and for one's career, but also regarding sexuality and family, is widely respected. Yet, most

successful political programmes in Sweden have historically had a strong collectivist approach. The foundation of the Swedish welfare state in the 1930s, as well as the development of the social insurance systems in the 1960s and 1970s, led to great individual rights as a result. But the system was built on collective duty. Duty to work hard, pay taxes (relatively high taxes compared to many countries), trust the state and its institutions, and treat other citizens fairly. This was the foundation that could secure free health care, free education and extensive welfare (child allowance, sick and unemployment benefits, pensions etc.).

Another example of Swedish collectivism is how the job market has been organised since the 1930s, with strong trade union organisations representing workers on one side, and well-organised employers' associations on the other. Individual employees have seen the benefits of joining a union in order to achieve greater collective strength in negotiations with employers. The foundation is the duty to work and pay membership fees to the union. The outcomes are strong labour protection, good working conditions and high salaries. The employers, on the other side, have seen the benefits of organising in employers' associations in order to get long-term stability and very few strikes.

The Green Party has failed to appeal to this collectivism.

The Green Party has failed to appeal to this collectivism. Instead of creating a collective inclusiveness based on a sense of duty and pointing out the clear benefits for the majority, one could argue that they have focused too much on individual lifestyle choices as explained above. Climate change is taken as a real threat by most Swedes, but the Green Party has failed to show why collective climate action is the way forward – and that it also comes with clear benefits for the individual. Simply put, the Green Party has succeeded in making most Swedes understand the seriousness of the situation and the need for personal sacrifice to pursue the goal of climate transition, but has failed to provide an answer to the question: 'What's in it for me?'. Saving nature, animals and future generations has been too abstract an argument for many people. The party has not adequately addressed the opportunities that a 'Green New Deal' constitutes such as new jobs, better infrastructure and economic prosperity. This shift in rhetoric and policy focus is necessary in order to appeal to Swedish collectivism based on both collective duty and benefits for the individual. Without this shift, it will be very difficult to gather support from broader groups of the population.

However, similar criticism can be levelled at the Social Democrats over recent decades. Still the largest party in Sweden, but with a clear decline in support (28%

today compared to 45% in 1994), the decline can partly be explained by a lack of ambitious collective social and economic reforms, which was the party's trademark for a long time. Following the financial crisis in the 1990s that hit Sweden particularly hard, the party has been much more defensive by not investing in the welfare system to the same extent as before (Hinnfors, 2017).

Ever since the financial crisis in the 1990s, every Swedish government, no matter its ideology, has been bound by an economic framework based on austerity. The framework has had strict budget rules including a cap on public spending. This has been an enormous obstacle for both the Social Democrats and the Green Party as it has prevented them from suggesting truly ambitious, and thus expensive, welfare reforms and climate policies. Influential left factions of the Social Democratic Party have been arguing passionately over the past few years that the only way to pursue a successful climate transition is by abolishing this economic framework (Reformisterna, 2020).

Dragging the centre-right away from climate: the challenge of the Sweden Democrats

In Sweden, it took much longer for right-wing populism to make its way than in other countries. But in the 2010 election, the Sweden Democrats, a party founded by white supremacists and former Nazis (Ulvenlöv, 2017), finally made it into the national parliament by receiving 5.70% of the votes. Subsequently, their support has grown stronger. In 2014, they received 12.86% of the votes, and four years later 17.53%. The current polls do not suggest any drop in these numbers.

Although the Sweden Democrats' core issue is immigration, widespread climate dissent has been apparent among their representatives. Similar to their ideological friends, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil or Donald Trump in the US, leading figures of the party have openly questioned the magnitude of climate change and shown a strong reluctance to take any action. Sweden Democrats are today primarily an anti-immigration party, combined with a strong line in climate dissent, scepticism regarding the EU, and opposition to gender equality and LGBTQ rights. These values have gained far more support in the countryside (although not so much in the north) than in the big cities (Jungar, 2017). The party has benefited from

Sweden Democrats are today primarily an anti-immigration party, combined with a strong line in climate dissent, scepticism regarding the EU, and opposition to gender equality and LGBTQ rights.

geographic polarisation and anger directed towards the capital, as well as from rising concerns around a welfare system in decline.

The growth of the Sweden Democrats in parliament has coincided with social media taking over the media landscape. Much like elsewhere in the world, many Swedes have shifted their news intake from traditional media to social media. On social media, articles are shared by like-minded persons, based on algorithms, and this has given people strong confirmation of their personal opinions and biases. It has also resulted in people being confronted only rarely with the arguments of the opposing side. When supporters of Sweden Democrats do get confronted online, they use expressions that would be perceived as brutal, racist and sexist in real life. As an example, there have been many hateful attacks and threats on climate activists in general, and Greta Thunberg specifically (Expressen, 2019).

These groups foster a strong scepticism towards the traditional media and towards science. The pattern is similar to Donald Trump's supporters in the US, although it has not set the agenda as fully in Sweden, at least not yet. This constitutes a new challenge for progressives in a country with historically high levels of public trust in the media and science.

What is particularly concerning is that while, previously, no other established parties wanted to collaborate with the Sweden Democrats – the current term has seen both the liberal-conservative party, the Moderates (the leader of the opposition), as well as the much smaller Christian Democrats move closer to Sweden Democrats in both policies and rhetoric.

When the Moderates, Christian Democrats, Liberals and Center Party formed the centre-right government during 2006–2014, they had relatively high climate ambitions. Today, the Moderates and Christian Democrats are very reluctant to even consider climate policies that involve taxes or subsidies of any sort. Although their representatives do not question the seriousness of climate change as openly as some Sweden Democrats, they clearly do not consider it the top of their agenda. Furthermore, they show little interest in proposing any sort of action to tackle it: one recent 'climate policy' suggestion from the Moderates was a tax cut on gas (Aftonbladet, 2019).

With very low climate ambition, combined with aggressive rhetoric towards the other parties, the Sweden Democrats have dragged their potential coalition partners (the Moderates and Christian Democrats have a formal agreement – and have indi-

cated their willingness to collaborate with the Sweden Democrats) towards climate dissent.

There is a real divide between the Sweden Democrats, the Moderates and the Christian Democrats on the one hand – and the rest of the parties in parliament, as the former do not acknowledge the importance of climate change, nor do they prioritise the issue with actual policies. This was confirmed also at the EU level by the non-partisan Swedish Society for Nature Conservation. The organisation examined the environmental efforts and voting by Swedish European parliamentarians during the past term (2014–2019). The individual parliamentarians were placed in the categories 'bad', 'okay', 'good' and 'excellent'. All parliamentarians representing Sweden Democrats, Moderates and Christian Democrats landed in the 'bad' category, whereas no representatives from the other parties landed there (SSNC, 2019).

The main challenge for the next national election in 2022 consists of these three parties. If the election were held today, they would gather approximately 45.1% of the votes. It would not be enough to gain a majority in the parliament, but not far off it. Moreover, there is currently a risk that both the Green Party and the Liberals will not receive above 4% of the votes and will drop out of parliament. This could be the decisive push to the conservative bloc's advantage. If that is the case, 'the Swedish paradox' will evolve to 'the Swedish shift': abdicating from the position as climate frontrunner and giving in to climate dissent.

A window of opportunity that cannot be wasted

That is the darker picture. Paradoxically, a brighter one emerges from the ashes of 2020. After a devastating year for Sweden in many regards, with thousands of deaths from Covid-19 and a sharp increase in unemployment, the various billion-dollar economic rescue packages from the government have indicated that big changes might lie ahead. A level of public spending that has simply not been possible since the 1990s, due to the economic framework of austerity, has suddenly become both possible and desirable. As other European countries have also shown, restarting the economy after the pandemic can be combined with an ambitious climate transition in a 'Green New Deal'. If Sweden is about to leave its era of austerity behind, this will mean completely new opportunities in climate investments. The upcoming years comprise a window of opportunity that cannot be wasted, as the need for a successful climate transition is incredibly urgent.

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Germany:

Climate policy in the land of *Wohlstand*

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Shortly before becoming Chancellor, Angela Merkel was asked what Germany meant to her. She replied: 'I am thinking of airtight windows. No other country can build such airtight and beautiful windows.' Bundled up within this superficially simple answer are the layers of complexity about Germany's relationship with its economy, the environment, and even the idea of *Wohlstand*, a German term that falls somewhere between prosperity and affluence in English, but also dominates so much of modern German-ness. Who would not like a comfortable home with windows that fit well?

On the driveway outside that home will undoubtedly stand a car, and its owner will likely pride himself on driving it at high speed on a German *Autobahn*. That there is still no speed limit on large stretches of Germany's motorways comes at both a human (higher accidents) and environmental (higher emissions) cost, but in what passes for a debate in Germany about this issue, the right to drive fast is to the Germans what the right to bear arms is to the Americans – an issue you dare not touch.

Germany's car industry is both central to the country's political and economic outlook, and has been tainted by scandal – the Volkswagen emissions scandal, or Dieselgate. Perhaps more importantly the way the country and its industries have failed to learn from it (there are echoes of Dieselgate in the Wirecard scandal as well) is more significant than the scandal itself. The mutual dependencies laid bare by Dieselgate – between Volkswagen and Bosch most notably, but also the revolving door between politics and industry, and the role of the regional government of Lower Saxony in the running of Volkswagen – might be acceptable when times are good, but it makes rooting out a problem hard.

Persuading the Germans to leave their hydrocarbon-powered vehicles behind and switch to electric power has had only limited success so far, in large part due to the nature of German business – incremental change and quality craftsmanship are viewed as preferable to radical, revolutionary disruption. Volkswagen, Daimler and BMW have been slow to develop electric cars, and when they have they have largely focused on heavy, powerful and fast models you can use on the *Autobahn* rather than small, nimble designs for the city. The headache applies to commercial vehicles too – *Deutsche Post* was so keen to procure electric vans it acquired an Aachen-based startup to manufacture its own as Germany's big firms were not in the market,[1] while the public transport authorities in Berlin and Hamburg wanted to speed up the procurement of electric buses, but could not find any manufacturer capable of producing the number they needed.[2]

What then happens when a radical rival tries to enter the market? Tesla is building a so-called Gigafactory on the edge of Berlin,[3] and trying to do so in record time. But residents in the area have been up in arms at the speed of the development, and now the company has been ordered to stop cutting down trees at the site due to hibernating snakes.[4] This has strong echoes of the problems a new railway station in Stuttgart faced – the presence of hermit beetles delayed construction.[5] The important point here is that getting anything done in Germany takes an enormous amount of time – because whatever is proposed will trigger multiple rounds of opposition, and participatory political processes to try to find a solution.

Germany has coined a new term for when this frustration is turned into action or protest on the ground – the *Wutbürger* – literally a 'raging citizen', although with a very specifically German take on it. This is not disadvantaged young people in the suburbs burning cars, but Volkswagen-driving, house-with-good-windows-owning citizens raging at what they see as local injustices. There is also a helping of NIMBYism in this – the very same people opposing the building of high-voltage power lines in Bavaria are often the ones also saying Germany should invest in renewable energy, but not in the cable to connect where the wind energy is (in the north) to where it is needed (in the south).

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This is all rooted in the decentralised nature of both thinking and decision-making in German politics and society, something that can be both a boon and a problem when it comes to environmental action.

Geography and decentralisation: an obstacle to climate action

The main reason that Germany is still burning brown coal to generate electricity – a ridiculous situation for anyone who has stopped for a moment to think about it – is not because this makes sense nationally, but because of regional concerns. The two main brown-coal-mining areas – the Lausitz region south east of Berlin, and in North Rhine-Westfalia between Cologne and the Belgian border – are areas that have suffered a wider industrial and social decline, and so the needs of the few thousand workers in the brown-coal industry in those areas win out over environmental concerns. Governments in other European countries might have been better

able to take decisive action on an issue like this sooner than in Germany where the issue rumbles on.

The decentralised nature of Germany as a country also manifests itself in the relationship between city and town dwellers and the countryside. Germany has no single major city as important as London is to the UK, or Paris is to France. Instead, Germany has a dozen or so important cities, each with their own specialisations, but none either hegemonic or geographically sprawling. No German city is more than an hour or so away by train or car from complete emptiness – forests, lakes, mountains or coastline. Even the *Ruhrgebiet*, Germany's industrial heart, has the hills and forests of the Sauerland region right on its doorstep. And as anyone who has tried to drive out of Munich on a Friday evening, or to put a bicycle on a regional train at Berlin Hbf on a weekend knows: Germans make the most of this.

The relationship between Germans and their forests is especially important[6] – Germany remains a heavily forested country, and indeed the total forested area has crept upwards in recent decades after the 1990s' determination to protect the forests from acid rain. The term from that period – *Waldsterben* – the dying of the forests is in use today to describe the severe problems some forest areas of Germany have faced due to drought worsened by climate change. The protection of forests – be that as a means to protest against road building or brown coal – speaks to the hearts of many Germans, and this is an issue that crosses the east–west divide as well.

By contrast, Germany's coastline and mountains play only a secondary role. Most of both the North Sea and Baltic Sea coasts are sparsely populated, and are geographically far away from the main centres of population (of the major cities only Hamburg has a deep connection to the sea). The Alps, and the impact of climate change on winter pursuits, are important in Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, but feature little in the public consciousness in the rest of the country.

Germans' relationship to agriculture and farming is also shaped in this decentralised way. Germans may have similar habits – everyone eats white asparagus in spring, but in Berlin it is *Beelitzer Spargel*, in Hamburg it comes from the Lüneburger Heide, while Stuttgarters consume *Bruchsaler Spargel*. In Berlin the apples come from Werder, in the north they come from Altes Land, in the south west they are from Remstal. This also means that farming and the agricultural industry lack the national resonance they might have in other European countries. Farmers are not a coherent bloc, either in terms of traditional lobby power or as a disruptive force to the extent that they are elsewhere.

The role of meat in the German diet – and its environmental consequences – is an issue that crops up intermittently. A combination of consumer behaviour steadily switching to plant-based alternatives (some even produced by meat-processing companies) and a renewed attention to the problems inherent in Germany's mass-produced meat industry highlighted by the Coronavirus pandemic (mass outbreaks highlighted the poor conditions in many of the plants) are pushing behaviour in the right direction.

There is one notable word of caution here though: trying to deny a German their *Bratwurst* or *Eisbein* is a perilous approach and should not be attempted. Partly influenced by the transatlantic argument about cancel culture, and a scepticism about politics being paternalistic and banning things, modest proposals for a compulsory meat-free day each week in canteens in public institutions became a central issue at the 2013 Bundestag election – to the detriment of the Green Party that had proposed the idea.

Persuasion versus constraint

Persuade Germans to change their behaviour, and they might follow. Tell them they cannot do something, and opposition quickly entrenches. This difficulty in using bans to force change is part of the complex question about how you get Germans as individuals, German companies and organisations, and indeed the German state to change its direction on environmental questions.

Persuade Germans to change their behaviour, and they might follow. Tell them they cannot do something, and opposition quickly entrenches.

Here, Germany's energy transformation (the *Energiewende*), which is most closely associated with the SPD–Grüne government of Gerhard Schröder and Joschka Fischer between 1998 and 2005, is the most important example. Looking back at that period, the changes were made in a way that went strongly with the grain of German political thinking. They appealed to the very local (solar panels dot the roofs of farm buildings across Germany as a result), the industrial (German companies benefited from investment boom, and exported technology elsewhere as a result), but did not force much of a change to everyday life (*Wohlstand* was preserved).

Germany's ability to stay the course with its energy transition has increasingly been called into question as other European countries have – in terms of practical

changes – overtaken it,[7] but this has not fully registered in German public debate. That the world is not doing enough on climate and energy questions resonates very strongly in Germany, that Germany itself has abandoned a leading role features less. Germans might be among the least overtly nationalistic Europeans, but there is a sort of pride (and *Energiewende* played a modern role in it) and pointing out hypocrisy is never comfortable for anyone to do.

The choice of the word *Wende* for the energy transition was useful at the time – appealing as it did to *die Wende*, the German term for the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of the country. However, every effort to copy the term – environmental campaigners talk of *Verkehrswende* (transport transition) or *Agrarwende* (agriculture transformation) – has had diminishing returns.

A further driver for the *Energiewende* was the German population's deeply held scepticism about nuclear power, an issue that has been central to the country's politics since the late 1970s. While more nuclear power was considered by other European countries as a means to decarbonise the electricity supply, this was out of the question (and remains so) in Germany. The roots of Germany's anti-nuclear protest movements are – surprise, surprise – in a very local protest in Whyl in south western Germany, while the actual fallout from the Chernobyl Disaster was more severe for Germany than other EU Member States at the time and cemented the issue's centrality. The anti-nuclear protest movements, together with the anti-establishment student protests in 1968 in Germany, were formative for the activists that formed Germany's Grüne Party (the Greens) – currently Germany's second most popular party in the opinion polls.

Technology, tradition and transition

While the individuals from the 1968 generation are steadily leaving the scene of German politics (they are by now rather elderly), nuclear energy is simply an issue that is not to be touched in the German political debate. Germany has reached a sort of detente with other European countries – notably France – on the issue, just about tolerating that there are nuclear power stations on Germany's borders.

Perhaps odd for a country with a scientist as Chancellor, also the birthplace of many of the world's most famous scientists, and with a major car firm with a slogan '*Vorsprung durch Technik*' (Advance through technology), Germany has a deep-

seated technology scepticism that can be hard to fathom. Inherent in the Audi slogan is the importance of incremental improvement – each iteration of the product will be that little bit better, technologically, than the previous one.

But when a new technology comes along – smartphones for example, or social networks – Germany has been slower to adopt these technologies than its neighbours. Part of this is rooted in the centrality of privacy of the individual in German politics, a concern probably more deeply and ideologically held in Germany than anywhere else in Europe – and, due to the country's experience in the 20th century, not unjustified. It is safe to say that any new environmental technology that was feared to impinge on Germans' privacy would face very strong pushback.

Germany's response to the Coronavirus pandemic, especially in the first phase, was widely praised, but it is the darker aspects of the second phase that are more worrisome. Germany has been a European leader in the prevalence of conspiracy theories around Coronavirus and vaccines.[8] While discontent has festered online, it has manifested itself on the streets in a series of nasty demonstrations that have been an amalgam of far-right political networks, conspiracy theorists and more esoteric and anti-establishment voices. Germany is ill suited to coping with movements like this, for it cuts against the deeply rooted sentiment that all the people have a voice in the mainstream, even if it is sometimes an angry voice (see *Wutbürger* above).

A further point of note – also historically rooted – is Germans' fear of unsustainable debt. The idea that Germans should not live beyond their means, and should plan for the long term, is deeply rooted in society. The political manifestation of this – that Germany's budget should balance in the medium term (called the *Schwarze Null*, literally *black zero*) – has crossed from being an obsession of the mainstream right of the political spectrum over to the centre-left too. The notion of profligate Southern Europeans causing problems for the Eurozone during the financial crisis further underlined this dynamic in German politics.

The Merkel factor

Little of this essay so far has been explicitly political, but one figure stands tall over modern Germany more than any currently serving politician can be said to do over any other European country: Angela Merkel. Part of her remarkable political success – Chancellor since 2005 – is how she has managed to reflect the tensions and

contradictions in modern Germany. Everyone in Germany sees something of what is familiar to their everyday experience in her. The calmness, the un-fussiness, the conservatism, the edge of decisiveness, the absence of any willingness to chart a course that is too radical.

But storm clouds are gathering on the horizon. For essentially party-political reasons Merkel's time as Chancellor will be over in the autumn of 2021, and her CDU party is currently trying to pick her successor. The task has proven arduous: The CDU needed to pick a new leader (since Merkel had already stepped down from the leadership of the party – if not from the Chancellorship). This occurred in January when centrist Armin Laschet was elected by the CDU membership. But as the Federal elections of September 2021 come into view, Markus Soder – leader of the CDU's Bavarian sister party, the CSU – has declared his intention to also run for Chancellor. The plot thickens since the pandemic has placed the CDU in a more difficult position recently and has sparked an internal crisis: a few months ago, it was a no brainer to ascertain that whoever led the CDU would be Chancellor. Now this is far from certain as the CDU star wanes, and that of the Greens is on the rise.

Other parties see opportunities in the potential political realignment that this might bring. The Grüne and even the SPD stand to benefit from any dip in CDU support, while the populist Alternative für Deutschland would see some vindication of its effort to pull German politics to the right were Merz to prevail.

The airtight and beautiful windows will remain, but Germans may peer through them next year at a politics that lacks all the stability and predictability that has come to characterise modern Germany.

Notes

1. https://www.greencarreports.com/news/1103326_germans-to-build-own-unique-electric-vans-for-postal-service

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6. For more background on Germany's relationship with its forests, see: https://www.dw.com/en/the-origins-of-the-germans-special-relation-to-the-forest/a-45613711

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Italy and Climate Policy in the Aftermath of Covid-19:

A cultural strategy

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On the 4th of February 1783, a devastating earthquake destroyed most of Calabria – one of the poorest regions of southern Italy – resulting in more than 60,000 deaths. The event shocked European *philosophes*, and enlightened reformers took advantage of it to formulate plans for a comprehensive material and social regeneration of the area, including the project of an ideal city, *Filadelfia*, established upon the values of fraternity and justice. Disasters are collective experiences that trigger abrupt transformations and place human communities in irreversible and often tragic situations. Yet, they also offer unparalleled opportunities for advancing cultural shifts and political change that would take much longer in ordinary situations. Likewise, the Covid-19 pandemic is forcing contemporary society to question its foundations[1] and is making a case for sustainable development. For the first time in the digital age, this moment of cultural puzzlement has taken a global turn. However, nations have reacted to the crisis according to their own specific long-term political context.

In Italy – one of the worst-affected areas in the world – the pandemic shock has exposed the weaknesses of a country suffering from twenty years of economic stagnation and political instability. Italians were not looking at the future with optimism even before the pandemic outbreak. However, when forced into lockdown in March 2020, they rediscovered a sense of national belonging and transformed collective dismay into an atmosphere of national solidarity that commentators called *patriotism of fear*.[2] Moreover, the pandemic disclosed to the Italians the fragility of their country and showed that it lacked the policies, investments and planning to face the next-generation challenges for sustainable development.[3] The pandemic also increased the population's awareness;[4] 66% of the population is now aware of climate change and the need for rapid actions to tackle it.

This acknowledgement boosted debates on a long-term digital and green strategy to modernise Italy. In June, the entire country rallied in support of the centre-left government and president Conte's successful negotiations[5] with the European Commission and the EU member states to set up a European Recovery Fund to tackle the crisis. However, since then, the political climate has deteriorated. Italy did not prepare for the second wave of Coronavirus, the government has not yet presented its strategy for national investments to the EU, and new regional lockdowns are compromising both social and economic stability. Meanwhile, public debt has increased to 161% of GDP.[6] In this context, Italy faces two risks. First, that the government continues to focus on non-repayable short-term *subsidies* to commercial activities, while failing to coordinate public spending towards next-generation *investments* (education, research, environment, sustainability), as noted by Mario Draghi.

Second, that citizens will start perceiving the digital and green transition as an obstacle to economic recovery (Italy has lost 600,000 jobs since February),[7] as already suggested by right-wing leaders Matteo Salvini and Giorgia Meloni – who asked for the suspension of environmental legislation.[8]

How, then, to keep the momentum going for a comprehensive strategy that addresses the health crisis, youth unemployment, productivity stagnation and climate change in Italy? Is it possible to preserve a unitary view of these challenges and engage Italian citizens with sustainable policies? The answer, I suggest, lies in Italy's past and polycentric identity and requires a radical overturn of climate change narratives. The way that Italians reacted to the pandemic provides insights on how to achieve that.

Italy was the first Western country to participate in a national lockdown, from the 12th of March. The citizens could perceive the seriousness of the situation by looking out of their balconies at the desolate *piazze* of their cities. The civic spaces that usually teemed with life, political chattering and social encounters were now deserted. Lonely statues were attended only by the roaring of fountains. According to one commentator, cities now evoked the urban landscape of a post-atomic disaster.[9] On the morning of the 13th of March, the leading news agency ANSA described the uneasiness and bewilderment of all Italians, who could not recognise the new profiles of their urban landscapes. Across the peninsula, the morning 'ritual of coffee and brioche at the *bar*'[10] no longer existed. The virus attacked the most profound identity of each city by altering its symbols. The *vaporetti* did not traverse the canals of Venice; the historic *bar Alba* in Palermo was closed; the shops' lights under the elegant *portici* of Turin were off; Neapolitan *scugnizzi* had stopped playing football in the street; the usual industriousness of Milan had disappeared. Stones and bricks were still intact, but the Italian cities were the same no more.

The *Corriere della Sera*[11] collected pictures to capture an urban transformation that Italians 'could have never imagined before', whereas *Le Piazze (In)visibili*[12] – a project promoted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – put together shots from the most iconic Italian squares. By emptying them, the pandemic had struck not only their 'social function' but Italian identity itself. As the project stated:

> When we think of Italy's cities and countless towns that draw visitors from all over the world, the picture that immediately springs to mind is the piazza, which is both the frame and the canvas depicting the palazzos, churches and the daily life that goes on around them. The piazza has

become synonymous with cultural heritage, but it is also a place for meetings and social interaction, for trade and the discussion of ideas. As Italo Calvino wrote in *Invisible Cities*, 'every time you enter the piazza, you find yourself caught in a dialogue'.

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That dialogue between citizens and their civic spaces, the *vivere civile* that defines Italian identity, had been disrupted. The piazza, once the centre of a unitary space and system of relations between the art, history and identity of a political community, had turned into a simple open space. By cutting our relationship with cities, the Covid-19 crisis has reminded us how much the urban space defines Italian identity. Divided by history, morphology, climate and cultural traditions, Italy's identity lies not in the idea of a nation-state but in the country's urban polycentrism. Its thousands of cities reflect their civic identity and cohesion in the art, monuments and architectures of their urban organism.[13] It is this unique connective tissue of cities, with their cultural heritage and civic communities, that constitutes Italy's 'natural environment'.

Like the pandemic, climate change is endangering the spaces and heritage that define Italian identity. However, Italians do not perceive it as a vital and close threat. In part, that derives from the focus of the media and experts. Climate change is discussed mainly by displaying facts, images and data related to carbon emissions, rising temperatures, sea levels and melting glaciers, which do not trigger public engagement. As suggested by Genevieve Guenther in *The New Yorker*,[14] climate communication is 'too data-driven and abstract' and focuses on issues that are not personal enough for the general public to directly connect to and engage with. Drawing on the pandemic experience, the discussion on climate change should focus on how the increasing number of extreme weather events are endangering Italy's anthropic environment and identity.

Legambiente's 2020 dossier on climate change, *CittàClima* (city and climate),[15] reported that 906 extreme weather events (storms, floods, landslides) hit 507 cities in Italy in the last ten years, with 207 occurring in 2020. According to Germanwatch's Climate Risk Index,[16] Italy has suffered 19,947 deaths connected to these events between 1999 and 2018. Just to offer a comparison, the victims of the Irpinia earthquake in 1980 – the worst natural disaster in the history of republican Italy – numbered 2,914. Moreover, the report showed the intensification of damage, occurrences and economic impact of extreme events on the national territory,

if compared with 2019.[17] However, apart from a few articles in the press (*La Repubblica*,[18] *Il Fatto Quotidiano*[19] and *Il Messaggero*[20]), *Legambiente*'s findings have not brought about any serious discussion in the country.

Italians were impressed last November when Venice was submerged by a massive *acqua alta*, which reached the level of 187cm,[21] while the limit of the normal high tide is 80cm. The media linked the event to climate change (rising sea levels and tropical winds moving north), but commentators and politicians suggested that the Mose[22] would solve all the problems of the city soon.[23] This wishful thinking draws on the idea that it is just Venice that has to fear climate change due to the fragility and unique environment of the lagoon. Only a few media outlets noted that while Venice was flooded the rest of Italy was in the middle of a 'climate crisis' too.[24] During the same days, a violent storm and flood submerged Matera, in Basilicata. The happy days in which the city celebrated the title of European capital of culture for 2019 were replaced by images of the *Sassi*[25] – the world-renowned UNESCO heritage site – inundated with mud and debris. Likewise, tornadoes hit the coastal cities of Puglia. Thus, Venice is not an exception, but it is a warning light for what is happening in the whole country. While I was writing this piece, a violent storm in Sardegna was flooding the borough of Bitti,[26] causing several deaths and damaging the historic town. Yet, these phenomena are still described as 'crazy weather' or 'maltempo'[27] and never trigger a comprehensive discussion on how this environmental transition is affecting Italy.

Surrounded by a maritime space and exposed to intensifying extreme events, Italy risks losing its constellation of cities and its identity *tout court*. Italy's past, its iconic landscapes marked by the profile of civic towers, church bells, museums and ancient ruins will be the first victims of this transition. While the pandemic is temporarily severing the connection between us and our heritage, climate change will destroy it forever. This threat involves not only the Venetians crying that the last *acqua alta* almost caused an 'apocalypse' at St Mark's Basilica[28] but every Italian. Everyone risks losing the iconic monument, palace or archaeological site of their city. Just like Bagnasco, in Piedmont, which lost its iconic Roman bridge[29] on the night of the 2nd of October 2020, or Volterra,[30] where the medieval walls crumbled down after a violent storm in 2014. According to a study conducted by Ispra and Italiasicura,[31] the whole national heritage is endangered by climate change: 40,393 museums, archaeological sites, churches and historic buildings are at risk of flooding; 38,829 sites are threatened by landslides; more than 80,000 pieces of art in historic cities are at hydrological risk.

However, the fight to protect Italian cities from climate change is not just about saving our past and cultural heritage.[32] For its part, it offers the opportunity to place

It offers the opportunity to place climate policy at the centre of our political imagination and present the climate change fight not as a futuristic project but as the revival of an idea familiar to Italian culture and identity: the utopia of the ideal city.

climate policy at the centre of our political imagination and present the climate change fight not as a futuristic project but as the revival of an idea familiar to Italian culture and identity: *the utopia of the ideal city*. Since Humanism, in Italian history, the city has been conceived not as a spontaneous organism but as the result of a project aiming at materialising the perfect political reason in the order and harmony of urban shapes and in the balance between man and physical space. The ideal city was not an unrealistic space, but one that could be imagined and reached. Its beauty and rationality suggested the health of its citizens and their freedom from epidemics, famine, poverty, injustice, and all other disasters that cause unhappiness to human communities.[33] Likewise, by endorsing the political and cultural heritage of the Italian cities, climate policy can be formulated as the 21st-century pursuit of a next-generation ideal city centred on sustainability, democratic participation and social justice.

Notes

1. https://www.politico.eu/article/the-world-after-coronavirus-crisis-society-culture-economy/?fbclid=IwAR2xSNwS9AFJSYMvsti00POz8jvivoFj1SPxif-kUjq1KwH9PXfUdOEwqxA

2. https://www.istitutodipolitica.it/il-patriottismo-della-paura/?fbclid=IwAR1VRbNKFxnBQK82tXfR6PrBkYolmXY_DSjaPYCDotC4gea1iFVJCjEwakY

3. https://asvis.it/rapporto-asvis-2020/

4. https://asvis.it/notizie/2-8246/cittadini-e-aziende-sono-piu-informati-e-consapevoli-sui-cambiamenti-climatici

5. https://www.corriere.it/esteri/20_luglio_21/recovery-fund-l-arringa-finale-conte-non-umiliateci-dobbiamo-morti-covid-06c84b18-cb89-11ea-bf7a-0cc3d0ad4e25.shtml

6. https://tg24.sky.it/economia/2020/10/13/pil-italia-fmi

7. https://news.trust.org/item/20210201152046-flj9i

8. https://www.lastampa.it/tuttogreen/2020/04/02/news/costa-no-a-deroghe-su-ambiente-si-favorisca-sburocratizzazione-e-green-economy-1.38669669

9. https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2020/04/04/coronavirus-paesaggio-citta-deserte/5758901/

10. https://www.ansa.it/sito/photogallery/primopiano/2020/03/12/coronavirus-il-risveglio-nelle-citta-deserte_3ed8bc19-2a22-4e4a-b4be-9f58a335c382.html

11. https://www.corriere.it/speciale/cronache/2020/coronavirus-citta-deserte-italia-e-nel-mondo/

12. https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/piazze_in_visibili/piazze_in_visibili.pdf

13. On the city and Italian identity, see Ernesto Galli Della Loggia, *L'identità italiana* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1998); and Walter Barberis, *Il bisogno di patria* (Turin: Einaudi, 2004).

14. https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/how-should-the-media-talk-about-climate-change

15. https://cittaclima.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/CC_Rapporto_2020-def.pdf

16. https://cittaclima.it/2020/11/10/presentazione-del-rapporto-2020-dellosservatorio-di-legambiente-cittaclima/

17. https://cittaclima.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Il-Clima-e%CC%80-gia%CC%80-cambiato-2019.pdf

18. https://www.repubblica.it/green-and-blue/2020/11/25/news/in_10_anni_quasi_mille_eventi_climatici_estremi_in_italia-275716344/

19. https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2020/11/25/clima-in-italia-quasi-mille-eventi-estremi-in-dieci-anni-spendiamo-19-miliardi-allanno-per-riparazioni-solo-330-milioni-per-prevenzione/6015652/

20. https://www.ilmessaggero.it/AMP/italia/clima_italia_eventi_estremi_allagamenti_trombe_aria_ultima_ora_25_novembre_2020-5607055.html

21. https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2019/11/14/acqua-alta-a-venezia-il-disastro-causato-anche-dai-cambiamenti-climatici-venti-e-livello-del-mare-gli-studi-sul-rischio-di-inondazioni/5562660/

22. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iK8oOiyLDSQ

23. An underwater barrier at the entrance of the lagoon (to be completed in 2021). The Mose, which cost 5.5 billion €, was developed to be used only in exceptional cases and for a few hours. Yet, scientists argue (https://www.lescienze.it/news/2018/12/03/news/inondazione_venezia_mose_danni_laguna_alternative-4212260/#:~:text=Ora%20i%20ricercatori%20affermano%20che,nel%20giro%20di%20pochi%20decenni) that the current increase in sea levels will soon force the activation of the Mose to shut down the lagoon for 187 days a year, causing immense damage to the ecosystem.

24. https://www.internazionale.it/opinione/stefano-liberti/2019/11/14/venezia-acqua-alta-sommersa

25. https://www.ilmattino.it/video/primopiano/matera_allagata_le_strade_diventano_fiumi_di_fango_invadono_storici_sassi-4858178.html

26. https://video.corriere.it/cronaca/alluvione-bitti-sardegna-immagini-dell-onda-piena-le-case/804d08c2-3176-11eb-a0a5-b463942ad8f1

27. https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/11/28/news/maltempo_un_morto_e_un_disperso_nel_nuorese-276173287/?ref=RHTP-BH-I274300569-P2-S4-T1

28. https://www.ilmessaggero.it/italia/acqua_alta_venezia_san_marco_danni_ultime_notizie_news-4860079.html#:~:text=ACQUA%20ALTA%20VENEZIA-,Venezia%2C%20acqua%20alta%20da%20record%3A%20%C2%ABAlla%20Basilica%20di%20San,si%20%C3%A8%20sfiorata%20l%E2%80%99Apocalisse%C2%BB&text=%C2%ABA%20un%20soffio%20dall%E2%80%99Apocalisse,a%20un%20pelo%20dal%20disastro%C2%BB.&text=Dentro%20il%20sotterraneo%20della%20Basilica,un%20metro%20e%2020%20centimetri

29. https://www.lastampa.it/cuneo/2020/10/03/news/sull-asse-del-tanaro-torna-la-paura-crolla-il-ponte-romano-di-bagnasco-evacuate-le-borgate-a-clavesana-fondovalle-chiusa-da-bastia-a-monchiero-1.39378472

30. https://www.lanazione.it/cronaca/2014/01/31/1018832-volterra-crollo-mura-medievali.shtml

31. https://cittaclima.it/2017/06/30/le-mappe-ispra-sui-beni-culturali-rischio-climatico/

32. https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/il-patrimonio-culturale-sfida-cambiamento-climatico-ACQWXE4

33. Antonio Trampus, *Il diritto alla felicità. Storia di un'idea* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2008).

The Environmental Narrative in France:

Risks and opportunities

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Across French public opinion today, there is a consensus that climate change and environmental issues have to be taken seriously: according to a Harris Interactive survey, 91% of the public are concerned about global warming and environmental degradation.[1] At first glance, in France, unlike in the US, climate change denial seems entirely incongruous. Furthermore, climate and the environment do not seem to be issues trapped in a spiral of political polarisation: nearly seven out of ten French people agree that tackling global warming and protecting the environment can bring them back together across divides (More in Common, 2020; EDF, 2020). French attitudes are comparable to those in most European countries, as a recent d|part (2020) multinational survey showed.

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However, the nature of that consensus – its evolution and existence – merits a closer look. The French have never really shown much affection, interest or concern towards nature. So, how could they agree on the need to protect it? Moreover, political polls and mainstream narratives have convinced the public that the country is deeply fragmented: the one and indivisible Republic may be nothing more than a collection of archipelagos (Fourquet, 2019). In that respect, to bring people back together through the protection of nature seems to be at best an abstraction – at worst a fantasy. But the fact is that the French love abstractions and great narratives. In a country searching for unity, could environmentalism be the most powerful narrative matrix in the national conversation today?

The consensus on environmental issues: myth or reality?

First, this consensus could be understood as purely passive. Even though a large majority takes global warming, pollution or environmental degradation seriously – at least seriously enough not to deny their impact – we could expect dissent when it comes to implementing green public policies. Pundits have often understood the Yellow Vests movement as a refusal to take the required steps to address issues of climate change.[2] However, the Citizens' Climate Convention (CCC) project tends to highlight the opposite: President Macron set up the CCC following the Great National Debate, as an answer to the Yellow Vests protests. This commission was made up of 150 French citizens (randomly chosen and representative of the population in all its social diversity, Gougou & Persico, 2020a). Their mandate was to

'define structural measures to achieve, in a spirit of social justice, a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of at least 40% by 2030 compared to 1990'. Supported by experts and policy-makers over six months, the CCC brought to the table around a hundred proposals that a large majority of its members approved. Research led by the Paris School of Economics attests that what the 150 CCC members consented to is reflective of what the overall population would consent to (Fabre, 2020).

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Based on a representative sample of 1,003 people, their study shows 'public support for the proposals voted by the Citizens' Climate Convention (with the exception of the 110 km/h speed limit on the highways) and a similar ranking of climate policies in terms of acceptance'. Obviously, as the d|part research shows, knowledge matters: CCC members tend to support doing more, probably because they are more knowledgeable. But rates of approval are high across the population.[3] The French are not only aware of environmental issues, they are also ready to accept policies that address the challenges.

A story of indifference to nature

The French were not predisposed to such a consensus: ordinary nature has always been largely disregarded. This indifference has a long history. France is not the US nor the UK. Among 18th-century French scientists, there was no Gilbert White who accurately and meticulously transcribed his observations of nature. Instead, France got Buffon's cold natural history, displayed in curiosity cabinets. White's works were republished 200 times in 230 years; Buffon's works were quickly out of date (Buffon, 2020; White, 1995). And, born in Germany, the concept of 'ecology' was ignored in France until 1970 (Chansigaud, 2017: 54).

Signs of this indifference can also be found in the media. The US has a strong tradition of popularising the natural sciences. In the 19th century, books, journals and reviews about nature, including a wide range of field guides, became an institution in the country. In France, nature was always an editorial niche. Moreover, environmental activists had no Rachel Carson[4] to build on. Nature was thought of as *scenery*, a space for socialising rather than for observation – think about Rousseau's *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* or Lamartine's poetry (Chansigaud, 2017: 76). As a geographer, Elysée Reclus wrote in 1866 that the French are sensitive to nature

only ‘when it is shaped by work’. Nature is acknowledged when it is ‘humanised, to some extent. The spectator likes to be part of this joint endeavour’ (Reclus, 1866: 365; see also Reclus, 1998). The French tradition celebrates landscapes when they are man-made. French gardens, for instance, are geometrically sophisticated and signs of social distinction – they are about the person who made them, how they can work on nature, and those who enjoy the garden. But they are not about nature. Nature came with the Romantics, but as a subject of literature or leisure and emotion. Fairytale, sublime and dreamlike landscapes were conjured, especially with the development of tourism. Everyday landscapes were not. ‘Nature is valued, Chansigaud concludes, when it corresponds to the dominant cultural canon’ (2017: 79).

So, in French culture, nature is an object of domestication rather than a subject of observation. In that respect, instead of being part of an ecosystem, humanity is promoted as the master of it. It is commonplace to say that Descartes influenced this worldview, as he wrote that knowledge of nature is a means to make us ‘master and possessor’ of it.

So how do we explain the majority interest in, and support for environmental policies? Where does it come from? There are three possible hypotheses.

The successful culture war hypothesis

The assumption here is that the politicisation of the issue of the environment increased its prominence in the national conversation. With intellectuals such as Jacques Ellul (1954), Serge Moscovici (1968), André Gorz (1975), or more recently Michel Serres (1990) with his ‘Natural Contract’ delivering strong ideological groundwork, activists were able to foster a conversation around climate and environmentalism. The story goes that they in turn convinced public opinion, and ultimately all political parties, of the need to take these issues seriously. In this scenario, environmentalism is on the verge of achieving a kind of hegemonic status. This scenario has some mileage.

A political success story

First, the French Greens, Europe Écologie-les Verts (EELV), have increased their electoral success. While the French strongly distrust political parties, the Green

Party has long been more popular than the rest. EELV's victories began with the 2009 European Parliament elections, with a score of 16% in some places, and they achieved similar scores in 2019. In June 2020, they won major towns like Bordeaux, Lyon, Tours and Strasbourg. In the democratic history of France, this is significant. Green leaders repeatedly joined centre-left governments, notably from 1997, despite strong resistance among other left parties due to the dominance of a pro-growth lens. From the 1990s, the Greens took advantage of the erosion of social-democratic and socialist worldviews. Twenty years later, in 2017, the electoral collapse of the Socialist Party cleared the path for EELV and forced all left-wing movements to foreground climate change and the environment in their political platforms (Repaire, 2020a & 2020b; Persico, 2020). Even Mélenchon's radical left took the environmental turn early on.

Green issues have also been claimed by French right-wing parties. Following President Chirac's major speech at the 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summit, the Sarkozy administration launched the Grenelle Environment Forum. However, productivism has remained deeply anchored in French conservative doctrine – even more than on the left (Persico, 2016). Political environmentalism first came from the left. But narratively speaking, no party would take the risk of overlooking environmental issues.

A civil society success story

The second element is the growing success of civil society initiatives on environmental issues. The 'Case of the Century' initiative is the latest example (L'Affaire du Siècle, 2018). Launched at the end of 2018 by a group of four NGOs – Greenpeace France, Fondation pour la Nature et l'Homme, Notre Affaire à tous and Oxfam France – this movement aimed at taking the State to court for climate inaction. In a matter of weeks, the petition gathered more than two million signatures. This was the most successful initiative hosted by the French branch of Change.org. French environmental activists are used to looking for shock effects in their campaigns, particularly against nuclear plants. But this legal-type advocacy strategy and its public success are relatively new in the country. Here again, it looks like a big environmental turn. And the 2015 Paris Agreement may also have helped NGOs gain a new level of prominence.

A media success story

Third, environmental issues are increasingly visible in the French media. Initially, climate change and ecological concerns were handled by a group of specialised

journalists. Over the past 15–20 years, environmental and climate media coverage has been integrated into the mainstream. Over the last ten years, time and space dedicated to these issues have tripled in the two main French TV news programmes (Reporters d'Espoir, 2020). In newspapers, articles mentioning the word 'climate' have risen from 0.57% in 2010 to 3.80% in 2019.

An intellectual success story

Fourth, an 'ecopolitical turning point in French thought' seems to have taken place (Truong, 2020). A new generation, which emerged in the wake of anthropologist Philippe Descola and social scientist and philosopher Bruno Latour, may succeed in overturning dominant frames.[5] These approaches tend to turn social concerns into political environmentalism. In the marketplace of political ideas, environmentalism is the 21st century's main innovation. Green leaders are convinced they are winning the war: former National Secretary of the EELV and MEP David Cormand, celebrated 'cultural wins' as a prelude to 'electoral wins' (Public Senat, 2020).

Limits to the culture war hypothesis

This hypothesis needs to be qualified in light of other considerations. First, because, as Gramsci pointed out, a 'cultural front' must be articulated with an 'economic front' and a 'political front' (see Keucheyan, 2018). Given that, from a *sociological* point of view, EELV voters belong first and foremost to the most educated group, that Green electoral success stems mainly from 'large cities that are most integrated into the networks of the globalized economy' (Gougou & Persico, 2020b), and that from an *economic* point of view, there are strong disagreements within the environmentalist movements about growth and capitalism, should we adapt or break with the current capitalistic model? How can we envision social security with zero growth – or even degrowth (Chansigaud, 2017: 110)? The 'cultural front' and the 'economic front' are still far from converging. Finally, from a political point of view, the environmental issue remains one divided among many. The Greens are far from hegemonic.

Moreover, this narrative ignores the fact that a green ultra-conservatism has long been shaped by right-wing and far-right thinkers (François, 2012). Two schools in particular have recently been more influential: Alain de Benoist's New Right, inspired by Teddy Goldsmith,[6] theorised a Malthusian and Neopagan environmentalism, while a new *integral* environmentalism, based on Catholic

conservatism, has been formed around the magazine *Limits*. This doctrinal work is now endorsed by politicians such as Marion Marechal-Le Pen (Soullier, 2019).

In addition to these political considerations, some institutional parameters need to be taken into account: the environmental movement's strong tendency towards disorganisation, as well as the impact of institutions: a centralised state and a sluggish civil society both of which stifle the movement (Kriesi et al., 1995; Kitschelt, 1986; Vrignon, 2017). Additionally, the majoritarian electoral system impedes the emergence of new political stakeholders. Coalitions are not fostered by the French hybrid presidential regime. These structural considerations, which historically distinguish the French environmental movement from the German one (Kriesi et al., 1995; Jacquiot, 2007), tend to point to the limits of the movement's maturity (Charbonnier, 2018).

Environmentalism is definitely on the rise in France. But can politics really explain majority support for measures to protect the environment?

The lifestyle hypothesis

Here we reverse our previous hypothesis: could it be that there is consensus precisely because environmental concerns have been *depoliticised*, rather than politicised? As a way of life, environmental protection is more likely to engage the majority, and this kind of evolution would align France alongside the evolution of other post-industrial societies towards post-materialist values (as consistently outlined by Ronald Inglehart, 1995).

New modes of consumption

There is some evidence to support this assumption: the purchase of products from organic farming has increased sharply over the last twenty years.[7] Circular and collaborative economies (car-sharing, for example) are growing. One out of every two French people – 10 percentage points more than in 2017 – is eager to consume less and better (Sessego & Hebel, 2019). These changes show that the French are organising themselves to face contradictory demands. They are aware that growth drivers are based on innovation and over-consumption, and that they are necessary to maintain their social model as well as their own comfort of life. But they are also aware that such production modes are bad for the environment, health and even for

local economies. The 'organic', 'circular' economy, or local economy are ways to compensate both for the effects of the economic model and their individual behaviour.

A mode of social signalling? Group identity

Social science research stresses that a lifestyle will be adopted if it offers a measure of social demarcation. Conspicuous consumption, for instance, was an effective means to differentiate the leisure class from the working class until recently. But with mass consumption the distinction became blurred. Today, what makes it possible to be different is conspicuous production. The quest for organic food, locally produced articles and the intangible benefits of preserving a culture are all markers that help to create a collective lifestyle (Cassély, 2018; Currid-Halkett, 2017).

Ultimately, environmentalism could be described as a set of social codes, adopted by the creative class – the cultural bourgeoisie rather than the economic bourgeoisie – and extended by osmosis to the overall population. Following this assumption, environmentalism became a matter of politics – meaning that people were able to acknowledge the systemic dimension of climate change and to translate this awareness into the electoral field – only once they have adopted and assimilated social codes. The Greens' recent wins in Bordeaux and Marseilles tend to confirm this assumption: they gathered votes from creative class workers who had recently moved to the city and votes from moderates whose values became more and more compatible with the Greens (Cassély, 2020).

An institutionalised environmentalism

Lastly, a paradox: the more climate and the environment have drawn the attention of journalists, the more these topics have lost their political dimension. An investigative journalist specialising in these issues, social scientist J.-B. Comby noted that their profile has changed significantly over the past twenty years: 'covering the environment' is less a matter of personal and political engagement and more a step in one's professional career. As a result, environmental issues get less explicitly political coverage: experts are interviewed and polemics about environment and climate policies are mainly 'neutralised' (Comby, 2009).

Limits of the lifestyle hypothesis

Regardless of whether adopters of this lifestyle are eager to make universal claims, research in the social sciences tends to show that low-income groups tend to be less

sensitive to moral gratifications regarding environmentalism. In part because for many, making one's own household products, growing one's own vegetables or taking part in community gardens are practices that are adopted because they are more affordable. Conspicuous production could be more divisive in class terms. However depoliticised, the eco-lifestyle narrative is not terribly inclusive. And it could even be perceived as a way to gloss over deeper inequalities: access to decent housing, good schools or intangible services that really divide – and distinguish – social classes.

In the end, the eco-lifestyle hypothesis runs up against the same limits as the political environmentalism hypothesis: both can legitimise environmental and climate policies for a minority. But they are not able to reach the majority.

The new 'master narrative' hypothesis

These conclusions invite us to, once again, reverse our perspective. It appears that environmental and climate concerns are becoming more prominent in France, not so much as a result of persuasive narratives but perhaps because these concerns are at the crossroads of distinct – and even contrary – aspirations. In short, the environmental narrative acts as a captor of different concerns and experiences that make sense, here and now, for – what turns out to be – a majority of people, regardless of whether the groups that make up that majority share the narrative for the same reasons.

Utopia as reassurance?

One interesting lens through which to think this through is to look at how the French see themselves in the future: what kind of utopia they might long for. In a large survey run in 2019 and 2020, research and strategic consulting organisation ObSoCo (2020) identified three utopian perspectives:

- an *ecological* utopia, defined by 'a society tending towards "sobriety", committed to "degrowth", and where people consume less, but better'

- a *security* utopia, defined by 'a society nostalgic for a golden age, anxious to preserve its identity and singularity from foreign influences, whether they come from economic and institutional globalisation or newcomers'

- and a *techno-liberal* utopia, defined by 'a society in which individualistic values and individual rights prevail, based on strong growth (but generating inequalities) thanks to the constant progress of science'.

The ObSoCo study shows high endorsement rates for the ecological utopia: it is the best rated by 55% of the French, ahead of the security utopia – 31% – and the techno-liberal utopia – 14%. Moreover, ecological utopia has the most supporters (58% of very positive evaluations) and the fewest detractors (only 4% rate it very low), while the techno-liberal utopia is the most rejected.

But, importantly, this research also points to the strong permeability between an ecological utopia and a security utopia. Those who aspire to a safe society have, for example, positively endorsed the proposal that 'living standards are evolving towards less consumption of objects, towards less quantity but more quality' or the idea that more time should be devoted to domestic activities. Above all, they 'overwhelmingly supported the proposal for organising economic life on a local basis' (ObSoCo, 2020: 13).

Environmentalism addresses a need for security: it offers an outlet for the desire to control not only our own existence but also our environment. It provides a response to the need to control interdependencies. And it gives meaning to a desire for *re-centring*: it resonates with a desire to make time for family, for the local for direct and/or local democracy. In other words, within the idea of 'protecting nature', what matters more is 'protection' rather than 'nature', in both a moral and social meaning. Environmentalism can be endorsed by a majority because it can be used as a great narrative by both progressives and conservatives, as an idea instead of a practice. It allows distinct audiences to analyse the past, to make sense of the present, and to open a way to the future.

France and the thwarted desire for a master narrative

But why here and now? After all, the French are not isolated in their desire to take back control and reject a techno-liberal mode. Beyond the effects of the political and media framing mentioned above, and a genuine awareness of the climate and environmental challenge fostered by a trust in science, some cultural features specific to France also explain the appeal of a climate protection narrative.

The first is an 'immoderate taste for a return to nature, formerly referred to as a "return to the soil"' (Chansigaud, 2017: 144). Until 1945, France was mainly

a rural country. Compared with the United States or Germany, industrialisation and urbanisation came later. In the national conversation, values of rurality 'anchored' in a 'terroir' and 'a peasant common sense' still remain, both on the left and on the right. This 'return to the soil' was also one essential to Vichy regime propaganda. This aspiration did not disappear with time: in the 1980s, 'being able to live and work in the countryside' was a common aspiration. Nowadays, according to 80% of the French, a successful life is made of a 'detached house as close as possible to nature' (Chansigaud, 2017: 144). With the Covid-19 pandemic, such an aspiration has once again been on the rise (e.g. Grimaud, 2020 or Viard, 2020).

Another feature is the manner in which France has produced national cohesion over its history. In England, historian M. Ozouf argues, national sentiment is based on 'a set of ancient practices that remain implicit', largely out of the control of the government. In Germany, this national sentiment has been based on language and literature. In France, the state came before the nation, and the nation was built by the state, 'which worked for national cohesion by ensuring the defense of the territory, maintaining public order, organising a cult around the king and the institutions' (Ozouf, 2015: 1269). The French Revolution and later Republican institutions did question this process: in fact, they amplified it. As a result, collective identity came 'from the top down and from the centre to the periphery' (Ozouf, 2015: 1269). In the French collective imagination, the state has a monopoly on the national narrative. But its capacity to generate that narrative is increasingly called into question. We are faced with a paradox: on the one hand, a common and top-down narrative is still expected; on the other, the state is not trusted to deliver such a narrative. The environmental narrative can appear as an effective substitute. It is not based on a specific community – it is not the narrative of a community or a minority – and the local, national and global levels come together. It could be considered a bottom-up reconfiguration of a common narrative, for a nation that is desperately looking for one.

Finally, this narrative ticks a third box: the universal 'mission' – that 'special link' between 'the particularity of French national history' and 'universal values' inherited from the Revolution. The need for a universal mission has long justified France's propensity to act as an 'exporter of freedom and human rights'. There is no temptation for isolationism in the public opinion. All national political narratives must refer to this aspiration to universality. Globalisation – which is not universalism – was roundly rejected.[8] An environmental narrative can question globalisation, and deliver on universalism. No wonder the French like it.

Environmentalism versus environmentalism: three risks

This efficiency constitutes a major political opportunity for ambitious public policies in favour of the environment and climate, as well as for democracy. But if poorly perceived and misunderstood, it may involve risks that must be identified. Environmentalism can work against environmentalism.

Missing the boat

The first risk is linked to the temptation of simply moving on. The environmental narrative works today because it meets deep expectations regarding democratic life while resonating with a largely distributed symbolic frame. But, like other Western democracies, France is going through a major political crisis – a crisis of representation, a crisis of efficiency, an increasing polarisation of public debate, an acceleration of political time. French pessimism and social mistrust are reaching unprecedented levels. The 'knock-on' effect is that the governing party is losing its ability to make decisions; its parliamentary majority is crumbling and may be swept away by new players. Political environmentalism is not immune to this trend: if the gap between words and deeds grows too big, or if it does not address other expectations – whether on sovereign or economic issues – it can be swept away.

Environmentalism against everything else

The second potential risk is the 'green ghetto'. This threat has a public policy dimension: local environmental policies can strengthen socio-economic inequalities, by 'confining the city to a space disconnected from its environment to the benefit of a population that will turn a blind eye to its neighbors' destiny' (Charbonnier, 2020b).

But ghettoisation is also a risk at the narrative level, where a partisan discourse can risk alienating populations that are not sensitive to environmental rewards but concerned with these issues (Comby, 2015).

The environment versus climate: a populist far-right threat

The third risk is the draw of a particular kind of localism, and specifically far-right localism. Marine Le Pen's National Rally is perfectly aware that the environment can be embedded in an 'us-versus-them' narrative. Localism offers a means to frame ecological issues through an authoritarian lens while fuelling an anti-immigration

agenda. The ecofascist sphere has long worked on bridging environmental and identity concerns. Since the 2017 presidential race, this narrative has been asserted more and more. National Rally MEP Hervé Juvin, a former journalist expert in environmental issues, is the architect of this doctrinal work. He draws a distinction between climate change and environment, by reducing the importance of the former and increasing the importance of the latter. 'Environmentalism,' he says, 'is a matter of localism, singularities, and collective choices,' as opposed to 'the globalist swindle behind climate warning campaigns.' He describes the fight against climate change as a hidden way to promote the opening of borders, 'while every living being depends on its ability to regulate relationships with its own environment, to capture what feeds it and reject what harms it' (Baléo, 2020). In other words, the far-right considers environmentalism as an opportunity to frame both socio-economic crisis – rural exodus, de-industrialisation – and identity anxieties.

According to I. Krastev (2020), green conservatism is spreading in Europe. Usually, this expectation is fulfilled by a coalition of green and right-wing parties, like some German Landers or the Austrian federal government. But the fact is that French right-wing parties do not take this expectation over and let the far-right distort it through an anti-migrant and anti-minority lens. Localism expectations have to be positively addressed and not given up to the far-right.

Conclusion

Among French novelists, Alain Damasio has the firmest grasp of the environmental theme. Unlike other science-fiction writers, Damasio does not seek to describe the end of a world, to tell the story of a planet whose resources have dried up and whose climate has become inhospitable. On the contrary, he claims to build up 'empowering fictions', i.e. 'ideas, sensations, perceptions that tear us away from our habits, give power to our mutilated desires; universes that activate the desire to live differently by taking this world by storm' (Damasio, 2020). In his latest novel *Les Furtifs* (Damasio, 2019), the author stages a confrontation between two utopias that arise in France: a country composed of self-governing zones as close as possible to the living world on the one hand; and a private, digitalised and ultra-secure urban France, inspired by transhumanism on the other hand. This story of merciless conflict between two worlds moves readers and resonates with environmental activism. Damasio's plot cannot be used as a narrative scheme to address overall concerns, but this dimension explains part of its success in France today. Environmentalism

is not only revolutionary: it is also conservative. Understanding this double dimension of the story is an opportunity; there are big costs in ignoring it.

Notes

1. 'Les Français et la transition climatique' (2020). Survey conducted online by Harris Interactive Survey from 19 to 21 May 2020. Sample of 1,028 people representative of French people aged 18 and over. Quota method and adjustment was applied to the following variables: gender, age, socio-professional category, region and size of conurbation of the interviewee.

2. This massive mobilisation was born in November 2018 against the government's announcement to increase taxes on diesel with the aim of financing the green transition.

3. For example, 85% of the French support the development of renewable energy – compared with 94% of CCC members; 58% of French people think that we should tax polluting freight transport – compared with 83% of CCC members. Among other proposals, the thermal rehabilitation of private housing with the support of public funding or the banning of polluting vehicles in city centres are approved by a majority.

4. Rachel Carson (1907–1964) was a biologist and an icon of modern Nature Writing. Initiated by Thoreau, nature writing is a literary genre that combines observation of nature and autobiographical considerations. As a marine biologist, Carson wrote a best-selling sea trilogy that explores ocean life. Published in 1962, her masterpiece *Silent Spring* brought environmental concerns to light in the US. Dedicated to the degradation of nature due to synthetic pesticides, her book contributed to reversing American environmental policies and to banning pesticides such as DDT.

5. Among them, anthropologist Nastassja Martin, writers Marielle Macé and Alain Damasio, philosophers Pierre Charbonnier (Charbonnier, 2020a), Emilie Hache and Baptiste Morizot (Morizot, 2020), historian Christophe Bonneuil or political scientist François Gemenne aim to broaden policies – and public concerns – to all living beings.

6. Edward Goldsmith (1928–2009) was an Anglo-French environmentalist and founding editor of *The Ecologist*. Co-author of *A Blueprint for Survival* with Robert Allen, he was a founding member of the UK Green Party. His conservative views marginalised him in the environmentalist movement: as a theorist of deep environmentalism, he advocated wilderness preservation, decline of human population and defended the values of traditional peoples. See also Goldsmith, 1996.

7. According to 2018 research by CRÉDOC, 70% of the French population was buying such goods in 2018, compared with 40% in 1998. See Sessego & Hebel, 2019.

8. Longitudinal studies show that six out of ten French people have aspired to protect themselves from the rest of the world for more than a decade; 60% reject the intensification of trade across the planet. It is seen more as a driver of poverty, unemployment, inequality and cultural uniformisation than a factor of wealth (see for example Couppey-Soubeyran, 2018).

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Poland:

Towards a post-ecological society?

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Let's begin this story with a short journey into the past. Who remembers the days around the UN Copenhagen Climate Summit in 2009? The financial crisis spreading over the world, denialist propaganda circulating through the media, and then – the fiasco of the COP15 Conference. Poland was part of the game, called by one of the German politicians the 'China of Europe' because of its anti-climate attitude and its love affair with coal.

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* wrote a commentary showing that this comparison was not only a little bit arrogant, but also unfair. Yes, it was true in terms of Poland's dependence (more than 80% of electricity was coming from burning coal and lignite); however, greenhouse gas emissions per capita were lower in Poland than in Germany. It's easy to explain – the Polish economy was less developed than the advanced German one. And it's easy enough to change the measure and look at the greenhouse gas emissions per unit of GDP to see that Poland is closer to China than Germany on such matters.

To find some answers we have to go deeper into the past, to the last years of the communist regime in Poland. The country was a sort of 'dirty zone', with extremely high pollution coming from heavy industry and a lack of basic ecological infrastructure.

Just two short paragraphs expose myriad questions about the real Polish position in the race to a healthy climate and European Green Deal. To find some answers we have to go deeper into the past, to the last years of the communist regime in Poland. The country was a sort of 'dirty zone', with extremely high pollution coming from heavy industry and a lack of basic ecological infrastructure. Even cities like Warsaw, the capital, were pouring their sewage into rivers without treating it. Power plants and factories were burning coal without filters. This was borne out in medical statistics and a damaged natural landscape. Poland was a place of ecological catastrophe and one of the dirtiest countries in the world.

The problems were so acute that they fuelled social unrest – environmental issues became a hot topic on the agenda of anti-government movements, especially after the Chernobyl catastrophe in 1986. This tragedy gave arguments to people protesting against the construction of the first Polish nuclear power plant in Żarnowiec. Chernobyl also served as proof that the very nature of the communist system was incompatible with care for the environment. People began to take on the worst polluting factories and new environmentally unfriendly investments, like the coal-burning power plant in Pruszków.

An early turn towards environmentalism

In the last months of the People's Republic of Poland (in 1989), environmentalism was so politicised that it was put on the agenda of the Polish Roundtable which served as a negotiation platform between the ruling communist party and the democratic opposition. The environmental subgroup brought important results in the form of a list of 27 topics. The popular will was translated by the means of the political process into public policies. As a further result, Poland became the first country in the Eastern Bloc to adopt a national-level environmental strategy. Caring for the environment was a top priority at the time, and data from the European Values Survey shows that in 1990 almost 75% of Poles were ready to take a cut in their salaries if the money saved was to be spent on environmental issues. We must remember that not only was it a time of deep environmental crisis, it was also a time when Polish society was facing the collapse of its socialist economy. Poles were leaving behind the old regime: a state that had lost control and an economy that had almost ceased to exist. It was a perfect storm, but it was also a perfect context for deep and rapid transformation.

In 1989 Poland adopted democratic institutions, and in 1990 a process of transition to capitalism began. Political elites decided to apply what they referred to as 'shock therapy' – a set of neoliberal rules to impact economic structures and create an open economy as quickly as possible. The strategy succeeded in terms of macroeconomic indicators. It also brought about huge environmental change: in just a few years greenhouse gas emissions decreased by more than 30%. As did other emissions of dangerous gases and substances. The change was the result of both new public policies and a deep market transformation of the Polish economy. The entire sector of heavy industry became obsolete and hundreds of factories were shut down.

The price of clean air?

The planet got fresh air – but the price for this improvement was – socially – extremely high. Shock therapy changed the economy but also destroyed the old ways of living of the many strata of Polish society. Hundreds of thousands of workers lost jobs without the chance of new employment. High unemployment (up to 20% at the national level, up to 35% in some regions), low salaries and precarious working conditions became a fixture of Polish reality. The situation improved just

a couple of years ago because of emigration and other demographic reasons. The priorities and values of Poles changed: having a job became the most important asset and recognition for hard work one of the most important values.

The environment was a big winner of the Polish post-socialist transition – yet when we look at statistics and environmental data, it was also a big loser in terms of social attitudes.

The environment was a big winner of the Polish post-socialist transition – yet when we look at statistics and environmental data, it was also a big loser in terms of social attitudes. According to the European Values Survey of 2017, the environment lost its attraction for Poles: by 2017 only 44% of Poles were ready to cut their salaries for environmental gains, in comparison to 75% in 1990. Economic growth and job creation, no matter what the damage, are a priority for 55% of Poles in general and for 67% of Poles in the 18–30-year age group. Younger generations don't seem to have inherited their parents' environmental commitments characteristic of the last years of the old regime.

This is an important observation as it goes against the popular expectation that all these 'new topics' like environmental and cultural rights are much hotter for youth than for older people. Climate as an issue seems to be high on the agenda of younger people: the first eruptions of the new energy of climate activism at the beginning of 2019 as part of the 'Greta Thunberg Effect' were really impressive. And on the 15th of March tens of thousands of young Poles went on strike for climate in dozens of cities. They showed unexpected skills in communicating their goals: they knew how to coordinate their fight and how to build up the movement.

But is it the voice of the generation? Or is this just another example of a minority movement of children coming from the middle class and saturated with so-called post-material and cosmopolitan values?

But is it the voice of the generation? Or is this just another example of a minority movement of children coming from the middle class and saturated with so-called post-material and cosmopolitan values? What is the broader picture? Different studies confirm these doubts – ecology and climate are not topics of the highest importance for most younger Poles. Generally, they care less for them than did their grandfathers who have the living memory of the ecological apocalypse of the late People's Republic of Poland.

What's next? Not necessarily a youth issue, but a cross-cutting one

What can we expect from the future? What about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and its influence on attitudes and values? And what about the youth? Researchers from the field of social studies are looking for answers and their first conclusions are not very optimistic: the experience of lockdown and sacrifices may well strengthen individualism with an egotistical flavour. We can expect that the next wave of the European Values Survey, post-pandemic, will show further lowering of the ratio of people ready to cut their wealth to support climate and ecological issues. And, in Poland, the biggest decline we will see is in the youngest age group.

But there is also good news. Most importantly – and against received wisdom – the environment and climate are not topics of political polarisation in Poland. Yes, political and media elites close to the current government like to show their climate denialist fantasies and their dreams about King Coal who will govern the Polish economy for the next hundred years. But this message works only with very narrow groups of the electorate: mainly among interest groups and workers dependent on the exploitation of coal and lignite or other natural resources. These sectors are unionised, so they can be *politically* influential but their *social* influence is very weak.

The majority of Poles accept the necessity of the green transformation and are ready and willing to say farewell to coal. Even more, having good cause, they are keen on adopting new solutions – in 2020 Poland was one of the fastest-growing markets in Europe for small photovoltaic installations. Brand new photovoltaic panels grew like mushrooms on the roofs of private houses, churches, schools and public institutions. This acceleration happened during the reign of the very same government, which, in 2018, declared at the COP24 Conference in Katowice that Poland would extract coal for the next 200 years. And the same government is the first one that set the deadline for the end of the coal industry. In spite of the fact that Poland has not yet signed the European Green Deal.

All these facts show that for Poles, topics concerning ecology and climate are not influenced too much by ideological or religious bias. Of course, we can show priests referring to the Bible in their arguments for the exploitation of Nature, but other people of the Church refer to the legacy of John Paul II and his ecological teachings. We can see that it's not transcendental values that dictate real choices, but the cost of energy which makes renewable sources of energy so appealing.

So, the question is why, today, as the world faces a climate emergency, are Poles so passive regarding this issue, and lacking the readiness to make sacrifices they used to be willing to make?

We have historical evidence that Poles can be extremely ecologically conscious, ready to mobilise around issues concerning the environment when needed, to politicise these issues and translate the political will into relevant public policies. So, the question is why, today, as the world faces a climate emergency, are Poles so passive regarding this issue, and lacking the readiness to make sacrifices they used to be willing to make?

The answer was given by activists of the Yellow Vests movement in France: before the end of the world, there is the end of the month.

Ecology became an urgent issue in the 1980s because the ecological catastrophe meant real and direct existential danger for everybody. Neoliberal capitalist transformation changed not only the economy and made Poland and Poles much richer than they used to be previously. It also made everyday life and working conditions much more precarious. As outlined earlier, having a job and an ethics of hard work became the highest values shared both individually and on a societal level. The culture of individualism, individual achievement and individual responsibility prevailed. Consciousness and responsibility have been privatised. And we cannot exclude that the Covid-19 pandemic will strengthen these prevailing characteristics of Polish society.

However, we must also take into account the lessons of the populist politics of the last few years: it is clear that this politics cannot rely on 'anti-ecological/anti-climate resentment' in Poland but, rather, has to draw on the resentment fuelled by the memory of the shock therapy and post-socialist transition and uneven distribution of the costs and benefits of the great transformation.

An ecological change for the better was an integral part of the transformation of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Now we are facing another great transformation. A green one this time. Preparing for it we have to remember the lessons of the previous one: an uneven distribution of costs and sacrifices can give arguments for a new populism with anti-ecological resentment at its core, fuelled by the memory of the old trauma and the anxiety about the new one.

Spain and Climate Change Attitudes:

Social concern and political fragmentation

Cristina Monge

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The Spanish population is concerned about what it considers to be the main environmental threat facing the world, climate change. Only 3% deny its existence, and the majority believe that not enough is being done to combat it, blaming companies and governments in the first instance. This is illustrated in the report *The Spaniards Faced with Climate Change*, published in July 2019 by the Elcano Royal Institute,[1] and borne out by other studies carried out since.

Beyond climate change specifically, the Spanish show high levels of interest in the environmental crisis, similar to other neighbouring countries.

Beyond climate change specifically, the Spanish show high levels of interest in the environmental crisis, similar to other neighbouring countries, and they do not think that technology will be able to solve this challenge without accompanying changes in the behaviour and attitudes that have produced this crisis. This is illustrated by both the study by the Elcano Royal Institute and the barometer of the Sociological Research Centre (CIS) of January 2020[2] – prepared after the Madrid COP25, an event followed with interest by 66% of those surveyed. The survey also revealed that 84% of the public agree that 'There are unforeseen changes in the climate due to human actions on the environment and nature', a percentage that also coincides with those who believe in the possibility of reducing or stopping climate change.

Elcano's 2019 study, carried out at the beginning of the process of drafting a Climate Change Law – currently in parliamentary proceedings – shows that 'the interviewees agree that the State should dedicate part of its resources to offsetting the damage caused by climate change, even if this is at the cost of reducing funds for other items'. Especially interesting is the positive assessment of the option of investing in natural capital, that is, allocating more funds to increase the country's tree mass and improve the management of forests (fires are a major concern for Spanish people).

Regarding the willingness to bear the costs – something fundamental to check the solidity of the convictions – according to the Elcano study, 57% of those who have a motor vehicle say they are willing to pay more for road tax to mitigate climate change and roughly the same percentage are in favour of raising taxes to finance policies to combat climate change. Willingness to bear the costs varies according to income – with respondents at lower income levels being less willing to do so, and vice versa.

If we look at who Spanish people trust to take measures against the climate crisis, this varies widely. According to the CIS, 46% of those interviewed said they trust

above all in international agreements, and similar levels can be found in governments and public administrations; 69% highlight the importance of individual actions; 49% put the focus on companies; and the greatest hope is gathered by the technical–scientific world, reaching 78.4%.

With respect to individual behaviour, the CIS provides interesting data. When asked about actions that can help improve the environment, the Spanish say that they recycle and separate garbage, and try to use non-polluting means of transport. Looking at the willingness to change habits yields good clues to attitudes and possibilities for change: 74% say they would be willing to obtain energy through solar panels, 69% not to use plastic containers, and more than half would be willing to buy green products even if they were more expensive, and to use more sustainable forms of transport.

The issues that top the list of concerns for the Spanish have to do with geography and a predominantly rural recent past. In this sense, the fires mentioned earlier conjure up the spectre of a threatened rural imaginary. Along with fires, drought is the other great danger that has been part of the national collective imagination for years (Cantabrian coast excepted).

In recent years, an intense debate has arisen in Spain about the depopulation of a good part of the territory, mainly inland regions (not the coast), which connects with these factors. Much of society, especially the older generations, experiences a sense of loss and nostalgia for an idealised rural past. Zygmunt Bauman would not hesitate to consider it a kind of 'retrotopia', that is, the longing for a past that was never as happy as it is now remembered, but that refers to a closer relationship with nature. The country-to-city exodus is experienced as the loss of a more relaxed and healthier way of life. Moreover, everything tied to its causes is seen as a threat to which we must react: droughts, fires, the construction of reservoirs or public infrastructure … or simply, the need to look for a job in the city, in industry or in commerce.

Younger generations do not share this imaginary but they do understand it, and to a certain extent, it helps them to connect with values related to health and quality of life, so it is also an important matter for them to consider.

So, the majority of the Spanish population is in favour of adopting more environmentally friendly living patterns, although there are biases in terms of socio-demographic and ideological variables that cannot be ignored: although attitudes in

favour of protecting the environment dominate, the most pro-environment positions are found most frequently among the young, the most educated, those who are more to the left and those who live in big cities. This does not cancel out the cross-cutting nature of this concern, but it raises gaps that must be borne in mind when designing public policies in this regard.

So why hasn't a green party triumphed in Spain?

Given attitudes in Spain, the question that haunts Spanish environmental discussions is this: Why has a green party with strong institutional representation never taken root in Spain? Although this reflection should be extended to all the countries of southern Europe, in this case, I will focus my attention on Spain.

In the years when the first green parties were emerging in New Zealand, Holland or Germany, Spain was immersed in a transition that would yield an institutional architecture and a party system that was to remain unaltered for more than three decades.

In the years when the first green parties were emerging in New Zealand, Holland or Germany, Spain was immersed in a transition that would yield an institutional architecture and a party system that was to remain unaltered for more than three decades – and that would block such developments. Thus, in 1983, 16 environmental activists signed The Tenerife Manifesto,[3] considered to be the precursor of Los Verdes, a party that would emerge a year later. Associations, parties and platforms began to form at the local level, identified more or less explicitly with the international green movement.

But at this time of party-system configuration, the fragmentation of green parties and movements made it impossible to contest elections with good prospects. And the political space occupied elsewhere in Europe by green parties was occupied, in Spain, by the Partido Comunista first, and by Izquierda Unida later.

The year 2011 saw the emergence of Equo as an umbrella organisation – after a delicate process of amalgamation of existing green parties in Spain. Equo attracted some prominent people from the environmental movement as well as others eager to build a new type of green party that could provide answers to both environmental *and* democratic deficiencies. But in a near-repeat of previous years, this coincided with the emergence of a new political cycle and the configuration of a new party system in which Podemos appeared in the space that would have been most likely

to have been occupied by a green party. Equo opted for what was quite possibly the only option at the time: integration into Podemos.

Environmental concerns that cut across the political space

The fact that there has not been a green party as such does not mean that the 'demand' for green politics does not exist. Today, the potential 'green vote' is divided between the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE), Podemos and the animal rights party, PACMA.[4] But the increase in cross-cutting environmental concerns have forced both conservatives and progressives to incorporate environmental issues. Two recent studies illustrate this analysis.[5]

An analysis of conservative political discourse shows (with the exception of the extreme right VOX) a recognition of the climate emergency, and only small minorities holding denialist or climate-sceptic attitudes, as well as a smaller gap between centre-right and left than in other countries. As stated in the 2020 publication, this may be due to the Popular Party's momentary recognition of climate change and its human causes, to the weak public projection of the deniers, or to the vulnerability of Spain to climate change, whose consequences are already beginning to show.

Conservatives consider that we are facing the most urgent challenge of our time, recognise the disruptive potential in the medium term of climate change and its effects on assets, and call for State engagement that is able to respond to citizens' concerns and can help reorient the economy along these lines. But the values and arguments of the two conservative parties in the Fernández-Reyes et al. 2020 study – Partido Popular and Ciudadanos – are aligned with those identified in other countries and are essentially related to economic concerns. The point is green growth. These conservative parties have therefore come out in favour of promoting technological research, approving a Climate Change Law as a generator of employment, betting on renewable energy and emission reduction as indicated by the EU, and developing cutting-edge industry, investing in companies with low exposure to climate change, and defending a competitive, low-carbon economy. However, these parties also display an awareness of the risks involved for their audiences (regarding limits on diesel for example).[6]

And for conservative audiences, the main focus is still on the economic dimension, and the economic trade-offs involved.

Spanish Progressives have been, and are, at the forefront of climate policies in Spain and Europe, although there are different strands and nuances within the progressive space – ranging from a majority commitment to the green economy, to a minority committed to degrowth. But at the heart of it, we find a solid base of support for the climate transition.

A discourse analysis yields the following key expressions: internationalism, global governance, long-term planning rather than short-term interests, future, community, resilience, prevention, sustainability, active approach, model change, ambition, climate emergency, reformism, progress, transition, decrease, change, revaluation of the public sphere, consensus, dialogue, participation, proportionality and cohesion, positivity, responsibility, increase tax collection, circular economy, Green New Deal, promote business commitment, intergenerational commitment, political relevance, climate crisis, social mobilisation, awareness, renewable energy and self-consumption, health regulation, legislative changes, requirement of legal responsibilities.

The Union party – on the centre-left – shares some of these values but adds others that place more emphasis on the notion of 'just transition, dialogue (intersectoral), opportunity (change in labour niches, social, economic and labour evolution), commitment (involvement), mobilisations, trade unionism, economy, climate emergency, social justice (provide alternatives, leave no one behind), health, awareness, realism (dynamism), communication (internal–external), progress'.

Proposed policies against climate change focus on Europe's commitment to climate change and recognise the climate priority set by the Spanish government. They also highlight the impact of the health crisis on the climate crisis – and vice versa – and the need for a green way out, as well as an added emphasis on sustainability, ecosystems and biodiversity.

For the Union party, the fundamental axis is the implementation of alternatives, overcoming the diagnosis stage, with a clear proactive attitude, and according to the aforementioned study, emphasising the *advantages* of the transition.

The importance given to climate change is much greater than in conservative programmes, and it is discussed in greater depth. Thus, climate change and the measures developed to alleviate its effects affect practically all areas of social interest: urban mobility, education, the economy, respect for animals, urban planning, employment … This phenomenon is observed in equal measure both in national electoral programmes and in the European ones.[7]

Conclusion

Concern about the environment in general, and climate change in particular, runs across Spanish society, although it receives greater attention among young people, with a medium-high educational level, progressives and urban areas, which advises us not to lose sight of the need to work in a special way with the rest of the sectors, mainly with those that may feel harmed by the transition.

The centrality of environmental awareness is shown in opinion studies and by the fact that all political parties, with the exception of the extreme right, genuinely attempt to tackle this topic. One could argue that the severity of the climate crisis is an object of consensus. A different question is how to approach the transition. This debate will quite likely drive political discussion and ideological debate in the coming years. The ideas of an ecological transition from neoliberal positions or from progressive perspectives represent two different models in whose struggle the new ideological configuration will be played. At least in Europe. Spain is at the forefront of this deep faultline.

Notes

1. Real Instituto Elcano, *Los españoles ante el cambio climático. Apoyo ciudadano a los elementos, instrumentos y procesos de una Ley de Cambio Climático y Transición Energética* (July 2019), available at: http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_es/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/encuesta-espanoles-ante-cambio-climatico-sep-2019

2. CIS, Survey number 3271 (January 2020), available at: http://datos.cis.es/pdf/Es3271marMT_A.pdf

3. For the Tenerife Manifesto, see https://ecopolitica.org/manifiesto-de-tenerife/

4. Animal rights party, see: https://pacma.es/

5. R. Fernández-Reyes (coord.), C. Díaz-Beyá and F. Heras, *Aproximación a la comunicación climática con audiencia conservadora en España* [Approach to climate communication with a conservative audience in Spain] (Zaragoza: Ecodes, 2020); R. Fernández-Reyes (coord.), C. Díaz-Beyá and F. Heras, *Aproximación a la comunicación climática con audiencia progresista en España* [Approach to climate communication with a progressive audience in Spain] (Zaragoza: Ecodes, 2021, forthcoming).

6. If one looks at electoral programmes and debates, we observe that in 2008 concerns about climate change were already present, although they decreased significantly as the consequences of the economic crisis became more obvious (from 2011 onwards). These concerns then grew rapidly in 2019, especially in the run-up to the European elections, a contest that, in Spain – and often elsewhere too – has always allowed for greater emphasis on environmental issues than national or local elections.

7. Regarding the mentions in the debates, the evolution is similar to that indicated for the conservative perspective. The debate with the most mentions of the candidates was in 2008, and since then, as the crisis progressed, the issue was disappearing from the campaign, until November 2019, when it re-emerged. As indicated when analysing the conservative discourse, in debates organised for the European elections the volume of mentions of climate change is considerably higher, which shows a devolving of responsibility towards European level.

EU Climate Policies in the Czech Republic:

Dissent and consent

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Despite the ongoing health crisis, Europe's 'green' ambitions have hardly lost momentum. On the level of policy-making, the European Green Deal (EGD) is central to these ambitions. But the European Union, being as institutionally integrated as it is, still has to reckon with national responses to climate policy, which differ substantially from state to state.

The Visegrád Group countries, for example, have opposed EU climate policy, asserting that each member state should carve out its own commitments to achieve carbon neutrality – that's if there are any to be put in place at all. The Czech Republic, in particular, is both historically dependent on fossil fuels and stands out for its Euroscepticism in Central Europe, which makes it challenging for Brussels to diffuse 'green' norms or enforce aggressive climate policies there. As one of the biggest greenhouse gas emitters in Europe, the country's leaders have been wary of EU strategies to 'decarbonise' the region, focusing on compensatory mechanisms, or avoidance of costly reforms altogether, during negotiations. Since the EGD was released, opposing statements have been made about its role in the Czech economy: in March of last year, Prime Minister Andrej Babis urged the EU to focus on curbing the spread of Coronavirus instead of focusing on climate talks; but a few months later, the government reversed its position, releasing a statement which expressed support for 'environmental ambitions', and where the policies were described as an 'opportunity for post-Covid economic recovery'. Such responses make the country's official stance on climate action inconsistent at best.

Czech scepticism and uncertainty regarding EU-led climate action are less odd, however, when considered in light of the country's demographic transformation, since it recently underwent a transition from multicultural Czechoslovakia, to a more or less monocultural state (the Czech Republic), and remains a fairly tight community that is suspicious of top-down politics. That does not mean, however, that environmental protection has no place in Czech socio-historical discursive spaces – quite the opposite. From the point of the view of the external observer, what stands out is the Czech Republic's architectural heritage: anyone who has been to the country's capital, Prague, has surely visited Charles Bridge, the Old Town Square with its Astronomical Clock, or has walked around Prague Castle. For many on the outside, these, and many other, landmarks constitute the heart of Czech culture.

But Czech people would hardly agree: a passion for the outdoors, and even a spiritual connection with rural and wild nature, is deeply embedded in the national psyche, in ways that are surprisingly similar to the Norwegian concept of *friluftsliv*,

which translates into 'open air living', and refers to a type of lifestyle where one finds fulfilment through a connection with nature. This nature-loving philosophy in combination with what one might call a 'coconut culture' (it is hard for outsiders to 'crack the Czech shell') are the main aspects to consider when contemplating the potency of the climate policies of the European Green Deal in the Czech Republic.

More 'nordic' than you might think

The idea that physical and spiritual well-being is connected to outdoor activities manifests itself in many aspects of Czech life.

According to an extensive study on the relationship between Czechs and nature conducted at Masaryk University in Brno in 2018,[1] The vast majority of Czechs enjoy spending time in nature. Generally, it is considered desirable to live in close proximity to a forest or a large park, a river or a lake. According to the HUGSI index, over half of the territory of Prague is covered in greenery (parks, forests, etc.), which puts the capital among the greenest cities in Europe. It has been a systematic priority of the city council to create new green spaces, and maintain and revitalise large parks and forests. Many Czech families own a *chata*, which can be translated as a small and simple cottage house, where Czechs like to spend weekends or even entire holidays during the warm season. Among popular seasonal activities are mushroom picking in summer and skiing in winter. Mushroom 'hunting' is one of the oldest and most widespread traditions in the Czech Republic, and Czechs think of themselves as a nation of 'excellent mushroom pickers'. This passion is reflected in the Czech language, which contains figures of speech that include mushrooms, such as *rostou jako houby po dešti* (translated as 'growing like mushrooms after the rain') or to *jsi byl ještě na houbách* (meaning 'you were still a twinkle in your father's eye'). The word mushroom itself is used sparingly and can mean 'rubbish' or 'nonsense' when mentioned in certain contexts. And, although the country doesn't have the highest mountains or the best winter resorts in Europe, Czechs are avid skiers. According to a survey done by Czech Equa Bank, one-third of Czechs goes skiing every winter. Moreover, close to 10% of Czechs are willing to go into debt to afford the holiday, meaning that the activity is crucial in the lives of many. Another leisure activity, hiking, traditionally makes the top of Czechs' most beloved sports. It is typical for many urban citizens to spend half a day during the weekend taking a walk in nature, which is a more relaxed version of traditional backpack hiking. Barefoot walking, which is another form of hiking, is a practice that came to the Czech

Republic several years ago and is gaining popularity. Otherwise described as a form of 'Earthing' ('*Uzemnění*'), the trend is aimed at reconnecting practitioners with nature in a quite literal manner. The most eager proponents of the practice established the Barefoot Hiking Association (*Bosá Turistika, z.s.*), the members of which spread information about barefoot-friendly hiking trails, organise events and activities, and EU-subsidised opportunities for barefoot practices. The most courageous well-known outdoor activity is the one of swimming in freezing waters over the Christmas season, which is also not uncommon for Eastern European and Nordic countries. Cold-water swimmers are referred to as *'otužilci'*, literally meaning 'hardeners'. The tradition was popularised by a Czechoslovak athlete who took their first plunge in 1923, and hundreds of followers practice the tradition annually.

All of this is worth taking into account because the relationship to nature is a part of everyday life, of people's leisure, and more broadly of their well-being. A good life, for a Czech citizen, is a life in which nature plays a significant role.

Euroscepticism and climate attitudes

The country's attitudes towards European climate policy can be understood only in the context of its transformed ethnic make-up as a result of its partitioning, its former ties to the Soviet bloc – as well as the country's growing Euroscepticism.

The country's attitudes towards European climate policy can be understood only in the context of its transformed ethnic make-up as a result of its partitioning, its former ties to the Soviet bloc – as well as the country's growing Euroscepticism.

The country's population is close to 11 million, and, according to official statistics, the majority is ethnically and linguistically Czech, which makes the country homogenous. Prior to 1938, the modern territories of the Czech Republic, in addition to the other former lands of Austro-Hungary, existed as the country of Czechoslovakia. Two-thirds of its population were made of Czechs and Slovaks, a quarter was represented by Germans, while other ethnic minorities such as Hungarians, Poles and the rest made up about 15%. Consequently, German-populated lands were given to Germany during the Sudeten Crisis, and the German share of the population dropped significantly. Czechoslovakia was involved with then newly decolonised Africa for over 20 years until the late 1960s, but has never experienced significant waves of migration from African states, unlike other European countries. The Soviet occupation of 1968 left a significant

mark on the country's history, and some of the most prominent historical Czech figures of the last century, such as Jan Palach, are associated with resistance to the Communist regime. Following the Velvet Revolution of 1989, Czechoslovakia was split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993. There is a widespread belief that Czech lands degraded as a result of Communist policies such as collectivisation of agriculture when large areas of the land were sown with very few varieties of crops, something which is believed to have had a major impact on biodiversity. Most importantly perhaps, for our purposes, Czechs are now extremely sensitive to any policies that are imposed on them 'from above'.

The Czech Republic (then Czechoslovakia) had been a member of the (now notoriously Eurosceptic) Visegrád Group since 1991, in other words, long before joining the European Union in 2004. This is a measure of how well it is institutionally integrated with Slovakia, Hungary and Poland. These countries remain the Czech Republic's closest allies in the EU.

The republic is now also one of the bloc's most Eurosceptic countries: initially, when the country held a referendum to join the EU in 2003, the decision was supported by three-quarters of the voters. Almost two decades later, European and domestic public opinion polls paint a clear picture of Czech Euroscepticism. Scepticism grew after the financial and eurozone crises of 2008 and 2010, when Czechs were left feeling as though they worked hard, but were forced to pay for other countries' mistakes. The criticism intensified with the refugee crisis of 2015 when Czechs stood against the politics of refugee acceptance.[2] National surveys carried out by STEM Institute[3] and CVVM agency[4] show that poorer, older, and less educated groups, especially those who live outside the capital, are more likely to negatively evaluate the EU as an institution and its incentives such as EU-wide ecological modernisation.

Another likely reason for the scepticism is the political representation of the EU inside of the country: Former President Vaclav Klaus, who held the role from 2003 to 2013, was one important Eurosceptic (although he denied such a label). Regarding climate politics, Klaus rejected the anthropogenic climate change theory – whereby humans are responsible for climate change – and this has influenced public opinion on climate change. Since the end of his presidency other Czech politicians have upheld his position, most famously Milos Zeman, who claimed to agree with Klaus' speculation that human activity cannot cause climate change. However, 2020 data from a joint EUROPEUM and STEM study on the Czech perception of EU climate policy shows that Czech society as a whole has not completely internalised the 'natural-cause theory' of climate change.[5]

Party politics

The Czech Republic has a multi-party political system: the centrist populist party led by Prime Minister Babis enjoys the largest public support but green parties do exist alongside others. The Green Party, founded in 1990, is a member of the European Green Party and of the Global Greens. But the Green presence in parliament is currently limited to one representative in the upper house. The party's political views are liberal, leftist and pro-Europe, and its message is aimed mainly at pro-European, urban, educated, and younger voters. The party members advocate in favour of sustainable development, high involvement of citizens in decision-making, strict compliance with human rights treaties, gender equality, social justice and solidarity, and global responsibility. Since 2020, the party has been led by Michal Berg, an entrepreneur, and Magdalena Davis, an environmental scientist. But the party doesn't have a significant influence on Czech politics. One explanation for this is the party's significant internal tensions and splits, resulting in some of the former members forming two other green parties, the Democratic Party of Greens and the Liberal-Environmental Party. In Berg's own words, the party has recently been unable to 'deliver a compelling story'. Given this lack of success, the Greens seek coalitions with other parties, although, as Berg admitted, these other parties are not terribly interested in cooperating. Some of the other Czech parties, such as the Pirates, have incorporated the climate agenda into their respective programmes, but this has not been a widespread move among Czech parties. According to Berg, the Pirates made a direct attempt to attract the Greens' electorate during recent election campaigns by coming up with a slogan 'Ecology without ideology', and thus exploiting the fact that Czechs tend to distrust political movements that directly promote specific ideologies, preferring to trust 'practical' rather than ideologically oriented appeals. Furthermore, leftist values come dangerously close to being associated with the values of the Communist regime thus becoming instantly discredited.

Environmental organisations (such as Greenpeace, Arnika, Děti Země, Czech Union for Nature Conservation and Zelený Kruh) have not enjoyed significant success in the Czech Republic. Their fluctuating efficacy depends largely on availability of resources, and, in the Czech context, there is not enough public funding to support NGOs, especially those that are smaller and located outside of Prague. Despite this, however, such organisations and environmental scientists enjoy high levels of public trust.

The most beloved Czech politician, Vaclav Havel, who was the last president of Czechoslovakia and the first president of the Czech Republic, actually supported the Green Party (although this was after he had left office) up until his death in 2011. Havel's political philosophy was heavily influenced by environmentalism, which can be seen in an article titled 'Our Moral Footprint' that he wrote for the *New York Times* in 2007, focusing on the rapidly approaching climate catastrophe and the necessity of climate action:

> We can't endlessly fool ourselves that nothing is wrong and that we can go on cheerfully pursuing our wasteful lifestyles, ignoring the climate threats and postponing a solution. Maybe there will be no major catastrophe in the coming years or decades. Who knows? But that doesn't relieve us of responsibility toward future generations … we must see this issue as a challenge to behave responsibly and not as a harbinger of the end of the world.[6]

Unsurprisingly, this rhetoric of environmental responsibility provided the grounds for some of the present-day eco-friendly lifestyle habits shared by many Czechs. For example, according to the Masaryk University study,[7] over 90% of Czechs recycle paper, plastic and glass trash, and try to reduce the amount of their household trash altogether. The belief in the necessity of environmental care is shared by older and younger generations alike. However, as indicated by STEM and CVVM, the younger generations back European values, including 'green' politics, but the older generations rather prioritise 'un-doing' the 'damage' done to Czech lands by the Communist regime.

The European Green Deal is not well known in the Czech Republic. However, the public is generally aware of the EU's 'green' values and ambitions, and it is speculated on in the media whether the EU's anticipated green transition could harm the Czech industry-oriented economy. That is not to say that Czechs aren't becoming aware of climate change: the Masaryk University study indicated that the majority of Czechs consider climate change to be a serious problem (67–88% of the respondents), and that climate change is already taking place (52% of respondents). The majority is also convinced that human activity more or less contributes to climate change (65–82%), and the majority of the Czech public associates climate change with a number of threats. The country has experienced significant natural disasters such as floods (especially in 2002, which was devastating for Prague's historical centre), and, simultaneously, high temperatures that often lead to droughts. Recent environmental reports also suggest that half of the Czech forests are threatened by infestation, which is fuelled by periods of dry and hot weather. The desire for it to

be addressed in political discourse does grow stronger: respondents indicated that industry and companies (according to 67% of respondents), the European Union (66%), the international community (66%) and the Czech government (65%) should be primarily responsible for steps to address climate change. However, Euroscepticism should also be taken into account here: in order to 'play safe', the Czech government should take the matter into their own hands. The majority of Czechs do not believe that they contribute to climate change on a larger scale or as individuals, which most likely stems from the fact that the country is relatively small, especially in comparison with such giants as China and the US. But, they do wish to address the environmental issues that threaten their shared bond with nature.[8] But since populist and Euroscepticist messages are favoured by many Czech voters, in order for more radical climate and environmental policies to be accepted, they need to be rooted in Czech beliefs rather than in shared European values and ideas (especially considering that there already are many possible ideological roots such as the environmental philosophy of Vaclav Havel), and focus on ecological revitalisation and environmental protection, since the absolute majority considers these topics to be important for them on the personal level. If Prime Minister Babis does not take another U-turn regarding EGD, we will soon see a change in how its policies are diffused in mainstream Czech politics.

In order for more radical climate and environmental policies to be accepted, they need to be rooted in Czech beliefs rather than in shared European values and ideas.

Notes

1. https://munispace.muni.cz/library/catalog/view/1001/3110/767-2/#preview

2. This opinion is also shared by Czech sociologist Daniel Prokop from the polling agency MEDIAN: https://english.radio.cz/15-years-after-accession-what-deal-czech-euroscepticism-8132340

3. https://translate.google.com/translate?sl=auto&tl=en&u=https://www.stem.cz/v-nazoru-na-nase-clenstvi-v-evropske-unii-je-ceska-verejnost-rozdelena-do-dvou-vyrovnanych-taboru/

4. https://translate.googleusercontent.com/translate_c?hl=en-US&sl=auto&tl=en&u=https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c2/a5277/f9/pm200918.pdf&usg=ALkJrhgraIA6dbx_PBIuLwVWVOMfrp5frA

5. https://www.europeum.org/data/articles/green-deal-public-opinion-2020.pdf

6. https://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/27/opinion/27havel.html?smid=url-share

7. https://munispace.muni.cz/library/catalog/view/1001/3110/767-2/#preview. This study, entitled 'The relationship of the Czech Republic to nature and the environment', is probably the largest of its kind. It includes original surveys and analyses of the existing surveys, in particular the Eurobarometer.

8. All numbers are drawn from the Masaryk University study, p. 125.

This collection is a companion piece to our Green Wedge report: these essays were commissioned to contextualise our research on the nature and content of social media conversations about climate in eight European countries.

But the collection is so much more than that – these essays can easily stand alone in their quality and insights. They reveal the crucial, deeply idiosyncratic and wonderfully subtle cultural, historical and social frameworks within which climate conversations, environmental debates and mobilisation are occurring across Europe. They reveal what we at Counterpoint call 'the hidden wiring of societies'.

Above all, they give us some clues as to what climate policy-makers need to know in order to act effectively and with agility in very different contexts.

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